

Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Undocumented Youth

by

Alejandra Maria Varela

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APPROVAL PAGE

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in the Urban Education Department in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Nicholas Michelli  
Chair of Examining Committee

8-29-2011  
Date

Nicholas Michelli

8-29-2011  
Date

Anthony Picciano  
Executive Officer

Anthony Picciano

Terry Epstein

Nicholas Michelli

Anthony Picciano

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

### Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Undocumented Youth

by

Alejandra Maria Varela

Advisor: Dr. Nicholas Michelli

This study explored the educational and occupational aspirations of a group of undocumented Mexican youth by using quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 125 participants, 62 documented and 63 undocumented, participated in the quantitative part. From this overall total of participants ten, (five males and five females) participated in in-depth interviews. The results of the quantitative phase indicated that the undocumented youth aspire to acquire a post-secondary education at almost the same rate as the documented youth despite the fact that they are unauthorized, have spent an average of ten years in the States and are not fully proficient in English. The fact that they are undocumented and face serious barriers in accomplishing these dreams did not act as a major barrier in precluding from having high aspirations. Consistent with the quantitative analysis, the qualitative data also showed that the undocumented youth are highly confident in their belief that having a higher education would eventually lead them to obtain the jobs they want even though they face such structural barriers. Time and time again during the interviews the youth explained the importance of education in their lives and asserted the fact that they want to have jobs where they are respected and where they can make enough money to support their own families. In the interviews, the youth demonstrated an awareness of

how their condition of illegality might prevent them from reaching their goals, and while this is a source of great distress, confusion and uncertainty, they still continue to persevere in looking for any educational and employment opportunities available to them.

America

Far,  
We've been traveling far,  
Without a home,  
But not without a star

Free  
Only want to be free,  
We huddle close,  
Hang on to a dream

On the boats and on the planes,  
They're coming to America,  
Never looking back again,  
They're coming to America

Home, don't it seem so far away,  
We're traveling light today,  
In the eye of the storm

Home, to a new and a shiny place,  
Make our bed, and we'll say our grace,  
Freedom's light burning warm,

Everywhere around the world,  
They're coming to America,  
Every time that flag's unfurled,  
They're coming to America

Got a dream to take them there,  
They're coming to America,  
Got a dream they've come to share,

They're coming to America,  
They're coming to America,  
Today, today, today, today, today  
Of thee I sing,  
*Today,*  
Of thee I sing,  
Today

by Neil Diamond

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the thousands of Latin American undocumented immigrants who have died crossing the Mexican-U.S. border in search of a better life. While no memorials exist in their honor and their names have been erased by the cruelty of time and the callousness of men ignorant of their plight, the unimaginable despair and sacrifices they experienced inspire those left behind.

To all undocumented immigrants —the day will come when *we* no longer have to leave our countries and live as strangers in another's land.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### **Introduction**

*“I can’t travel, you know, I can’t drive, I can’t vote, I can’t be involved in many social activities because of it [her undocumented status], I can’t apply for scholarships, I can’t apply for financial aid, I can’t apply for loans, I can’t buy a home, I can’t do anything, you know, I’m just like, like I’m non-existent in a way, you know what I mean? As my senior year approaches, I’m like, what am I gonna do?”* (Huber & Malagon, 2007, p. 17)

Americans are said to be under “alien attack” and their borderlands are threatened by “criminal aliens” “wetbacks” looking to take their jobs away and lower their standard of living. This rhetoric is loudly heard in some media outlets by alarmed citizens and is progressively aimed at the increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants. Such denigrating speech, while convincing to some, unfortunately singles out a specific sector of society and contrasts with the widely perceived notion that the United States is a country of immigrants, and that as such, it welcomes those in need onto its shores and land frontiers. As a result, in the never-ending plight to assimilate immigrants, divisive and exclusionary immigration policies have led some sectors of the immigrant community to be ignored; this group includes undocumented youth, adolescents who are graduating H.S. and entering the labor market.

It has been stereotypically thought that undocumented workers are transient servants or nomads, not really part of a social network, who come into the United States always planning to eventually go back to their countries of origin. Since unauthorized immigrants are mostly defined as one group of nomadic young males, the children and adolescents who are brought into the country unauthorized and who form their primary identifications and associations within American communities by spending their formative years in the United States are seldom

discussed. In this manner, these youth are excluded from the legislative books and from obtaining an education based on their needs since schools are forbidden to officially acknowledge their presence.

### **Unauthorized in the Land of Opportunity**

Unauthorized immigrants are defined in the literature “as all foreign-born non-citizens...who entered the U.S. without inspection or were admitted temporarily” but stayed (Hoefler, Rytina, & Baker, 2008, p.1). Contrary to popular belief, not all undocumented immigrants enter the country illegally or through the Mexican border; many enter through the Canadian border since it is less secure, while many others enter legally but overstay their visas because they fear that they will not be able to come back. Those who overstay their visas represent approximately 40 percent of the illegal population (Passel, 2006).

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates that the unauthorized immigrant population in the U.S. was approximately 10.8 million as of January 2009. Of the 10.8 million unauthorized immigrants, it is estimated that roughly 1.3 million are minors, of which, 710,000 are males and 620,000 are females (Hoefler, Rytina, & Baker, 2010). Of the aforementioned number of minors, the Immigration Policy Center (IPC) estimates that “approximately 65,000 undocumented children who have lived in the U.S. for five years or longer graduate from high school each year” (2007a, p.1). Additionally, of the undocumented youth population presently in the U.S., 80 percent have migrated from Mexico and Latin America (Hoefler, Rytina & Baker, 2008; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Latin@s represent a statistically high number of the total undocumented youth population (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009).

Federal agencies can only estimate the number of unauthorized persons living in the country. Schools also cannot legally ask and/or disclose the immigration status of their students,

making it impossible to obtain reliable data on the true number of undocumented school-age children in the U.S. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau of 2000 shows that well over 300,000, almost six percent of all children attending public school schools in the state of California, the state with the largest immigration in the U.S., were undocumented (Passel, 2005a; Passel, 2005b). Correspondingly, the state of New York, the second largest immigration state in the U.S., “had around 88,000 undocumented children attending public schools” (Green, 2003, p.56). The third largest immigration state, Texas, “had around 94,000 undocumented children attending school” (p.56). While these numbers are not exact, they show that public schools in states that have been traditional entry portals for immigrants have an undocumented population of students whose needs vary from documented students and thus require specific accommodations which they may or may not in fact receive.

In addition to the fact that there is a considerable population of undocumented youth in traditional immigration states, unauthorized immigrants and their children have also expanded to form new immigrant settlements, entering both new urban and rural regions in search of jobs, further demonstrating the urgency of addressing the futures of undocumented youth. To illustrate, almost overnight, Latin@ immigrants have become the main source of labor for meatpacking plants in Omaha, Neb., carpet factories in Dalton, Ga., the construction industry in Atlanta, and poultry plants in Delaware and North Carolina, where they also haul in the tobacco harvest (Massey, 2008). While unauthorized immigrants make new inroads into non-traditional immigrant areas, undocumented youth who graduate high school are effectively forced and tied to low paying jobs due to their immigration status. As a result, these youths are getting “locked out of the opportunity structure” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.4). This occurs in

spite of the fact that unauthorized youth are educated to be upwardly mobile and to contribute to the educational and economic makeup of the Nation.

### **Undocumented and at the Threshold of Adulthood**

Adolescence is the period of psychological and social transition between childhood and adulthood. This transition involves biological and psychological changes (Sheen, 2007). In modern-day U.S. culture “the popular image we hold of youth in general is one of carefree innocence, living out a time of breezy self-indulgence and creative self-inventions” (Bayoumi, 2008, p. 26). In contrast, the picture that is usually presented of undocumented youth is one of either criminals or young hoodlums associated with gang activities (Solis, 2003). These violent images leave very little room for a true understanding of the persons/experiences/emotions/pains/aspirations that lie behind the curtain of illegality. The constantly uttered statements are simplistic and mostly around the same rhetorical frame: “They should not be here, they are committing a crime.” These assertions are continuously viewed through the narrow-eyes of hate and xenophobia, “as if enemies [were] living among us” (Bayoumi, 2008, p. 260).

While “adolescent years are a time of profound transformations...where identities and plans often change rapidly and where key formative experiences determine the course of future lives” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 245), undocumented youth who find themselves at the crossroads of graduating or not from high school and entering the labor market face a daunting task. Not only are they discovering who they are within their environment, but more importantly, they are starting to understand what values and what aspirations will guide and help them fulfill their future expectations as they contribute to society. For unauthorized youth, the equation of graduating from high school, going to college, and getting a job is thus not linear but

is instead a dangerous, zigzagging process most times interrupted by many barriers and continuous paradoxes they face in and outside school. Inconsistently, they have been integrated by a school system that tells them that they can achieve anything they want for themselves, their families, their community and the Nation. While on the other hand, the rhetoric they hear in public forums increasingly shows them that they are despised as intruders and takers of Americans' benefits.

The obstacles that undocumented youth face persist while there are well over 1.3 million undocumented youth in the U.S. eagerly awaiting a law that addresses their paradoxical existence within the migratory system of laws (Brickman, 2006; Lee, 2006; Olivas, 2004). Approximately 65,000 undocumented youth are being added to the labor force every year, most of them having lived in the U.S. for five years or longer and having graduated from U.S. public schools (Immigration Policy Center, 2007). Of this number, it is estimated that only about 7,000-13,000 of these students go on to college (Gonzales, 2007). As a result, most of these youths are effectively condemned to live in the shadows and are not able to achieve their most basic dreams of obtaining more than poverty wages without having to hide from the law. This trend not only generates a class of underground workers who are effectively exploited, but additionally creates an untapped source of workers who are in great demand.

Adding to the fact that after high school graduation undocumented youth eventually become underground workers, even before graduation they face a multitude of other problems affecting the academic achievement of other Latin@ students in the school system. Some of these factors include: Being a minority student attending intensely segregated inner-city schools (Hao & Pong, 2008; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002), coming from a low income home

where English is not the primary language (Perez et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), subtractive schooling and assimilation practices (Valenzuela, 1999; Valenzuela, 2005), bilingual practices which nullify Spanish, (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008; Gibson, 1993; Valdez, 1998), neo-colonial practices, (Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005) racial discrimination, (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Ruglis, 2009), pressure to work full time and/or part-time to help family members, (Fry, 2002; Zhou, Lee, Vallejo, Tafoya-Estrada, & Xiong, 2008), low educational, social, and cultural capital of immigrant parents (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), low socioeconomic status of parents which substantially explains many of the lower educational outcomes of student (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Warren, 1996) and school-work which is disconnected from life-work. So immigrant undocumented Latin@ students effectively suffer a “pattern of triple [and multilayered] segregation —by race, language, and poverty” (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 89), and for undocumented students, add to this ill-fated triage, immigration status.

While it is clear that the abovementioned factors presently affect all minority students, undocumented youth face even more barriers in achieving their most basic educational aspirations, i.e., obtaining a high school degree, a post-secondary education and worse yet, in translating any educational achievements into significant marketable benefits. But the setbacks of being young and undocumented in the U.S. also include legal, social and emotional harms; since unauthorized persons are highly reluctant to obtain any legal resources and medical help, this makes them vulnerable to countless mistreatments, due to their fear of being apprehended (Dozier, 1993). This, combined with the limited access to jobs, education, and social services, severely restricts their efforts for socioeconomic

mobility and full integration into their communities (Abrego, 2006; Chavez, 1994; Menjivar, 2008; Ngai, 2004).

### **Purpose**

This study focused on analyzing the educational and occupational aspirations of a group of Mexican undocumented youth ages 17-21 and to use this knowledge as a springboard to examine their aspirations and the barriers they face as undocumented youth. This study encompassed the following main goals: First, to use a mixed-methods approach to identify undocumented youth's educational and occupational aspirations, and second to present unauthorized youths' narratives and use this knowledge to examine their barriers and future plans for achievement.

This two-phase, sequentially mixed-methods study surveyed undocumented youths' aspirations with the intent of building upon these views with qualitative interviews. In the first phase, a survey method addressed the differences between the aspirations of a group of undocumented and documented youth living in a small town in New Jersey while taking into account the following variables: Immigration status, gender, and time-lived in the U.S. The data gathered from this first phase was then explored in a second qualitative phase. Following up with qualitative interviews helped in clarifying and expanding on the findings of the survey method.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions that guided this study:

Central question:

How do undocumented Mexican youth aged 17-21 express their educational and occupational aspirations in comparison to documented youth, and how do they narrate their plans for the future?

1. How are the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?
2. What are undocumented youth's educational and occupational aspirations?
3. What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the educational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth?
4. Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school?
5. What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals?
6. How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?

### **Significance of the Study**

Although a wide range of literature exists on the educational and professional achievement and aspirations of first and second-generation immigrants (Crosnoe & Lopez Gonzalez, 2005; Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Zhou et al., 2008), to date, there is yet to be a study that comprehensively looks at this issue from the unique perspective of undocumented youths ages 17-21. The studies that have undertaken the difficult path of documenting some of the experiences of unauthorized youth have focused on the students' college dreams, educational and financial barriers to admission and completion (De Leon, 2005; Muñoz, 2008; Oliverez, 2006), factors affecting and/or contributing to their academic resilience (Contreras, 2009; Perez et al., 2009), and the effects of immigration policies from a legal scholarship perspective (De Genova, 2004; Olivas, 2005; Pabón-López, 2005; Stevenson, 2004). Other literature on undocumented youth has

explored the psychological implications of their immigration status (Dozier, 1993), while others have studied the concept of “illegality” as a criminalizing agent in the youth’s lives (Solis, 2003) as well as investigated the political activism of some undocumented youth in California (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2008; Negron-Gonzales, 2009). However, this study deviated from these paths and contributes to the literature by highlighting the ways in which ‘illegality’ affects the youth’s education and future opportunities for both educational and occupational advancement.

Additionally, this study is significant because most undocumented youths are unable to pursue a post-secondary education; therefore, it is important to examine their occupational goals as well. Labor market aspirations and pathways of attainment are aspects within the lives of unauthorized youth which have been overlooked in the literature in favor of learning about their college-going experiences (Freedman, 2004; Huber Perez & Malagon, 2007; Muñoz, 2008; Perez et al., 2009; Rangel, 2001). Centering on the post-secondary achievement of undocumented students has produced an array of studies focusing on a single aspect of the multi-faceted, multi-directional, and multi-settlement aspect of the migratory process, and most drastically, of the paradoxical legal status that thousands of undocumented students face at the threshold of graduating high school. This at times narrow view has ignored the very important fact that even if undocumented youth succeed in obtaining a college degree, they will still not be able to legally find a job. Hence, educational aspirations and attainment should not be considered in isolation of occupational aspirations and of the barriers in fulfilling their expectations.

In addition to the importance of bridging educational and occupational aspirations within the context of their illegality, the significance of this study is also reflected in its timeliness. The latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the undocumented population reached approximately 10 million in 2009, and given the fact that roughly 1.3 million are minors (Hoefler

et al., 2010), more attention should be given to the future of this disenfranchised group by the school system, educational and immigration researchers, and ultimately the legislative process. However, the fact that unauthorized youth continue to be effectively ignored speaks of an isolationist process that must be addressed, examined and challenged in the research literature.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework focuses on two essential elements: First that immigrant groups —documented and undocumented—need to be studied separately and according to their unique backgrounds and needs, which are moderated by time, space, and positionality. Undocumented youth need to be studied separately because their irregular immigration status inevitably influences many of the decisions they make about their lives. This fact challenges the ways in which unauthorized immigrants have been “thrown into the academic pot” and studied as a homogenous group with all other immigrant groups effectively leaving a specific sector of the population out of the picture and/or haphazardly studied. By concentrating on undocumented youth’s frames of reference, *undocumentedness* is then situated outside the construct of illegality, thereby emphasizing the importance of studying these youths within the specificities of their individual experiences, predicaments, and life aspirations.

Second, this study makes known undocumented youths’ “concrete human experiences — discussions, feelings, actions —through their social and economic organization[s]” (Plummer, 2001, p.14). In light of this, Critical Theory (CritTheory) underlines the inner workings of power structures and the particular divisions within/among society and the different interests and power relations “that cultivate elitism of insiders and out-siders [and] which are often mediated by social relations of capitalist production and consumption” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 405). These are the foundational concepts that allowed for an analysis that posited

undocumented youths as whole human actors and potential agents for their own self-definitions, self-narratives and understandings.

However, a CritTheory lens alone does not accurately position this study within the larger body of research on immigration. This study is better positioned within Latin@ Critical (LatCrit) as an important “framer” of the multi-dialectical, multi-ethnic, and multi-migratory nature of the undocumented experience in the U.S. LatCrit theory in this study was guided by the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal and Daniel Solórzano, and it underscores the various experiences of Latin@ immigrants and was used to contextualize and acknowledge that Latin@s have histories that have been shaped by intersecting forms of subordination, (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005) including immigration status.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit)**

LatCrit theory is employed in this study as the tool to explore the narratives of Mexican undocumented youth whose experiences have been constructed by the mind-sets operating in the public arena, which treat most undocumented youth and people as monolithic structures, ‘one and the same.’ Using LatCrit calls for a centralization of the narratives of undocumented youth and positions their present lives within the broader economic and historical forces that continue to alienate them despite the well-documented history of manipulation which they continue to overcome. Without this contextually and historically geared examination, it is ineffective to challenge hegemonic narratives of unauthorized youth/people. This looking back sets the stage to begin re-contextualizing the hegemonic stereotypical conceptions of unauthorized immigrants and to begin to create a picture of the whole person. Therefore, in order to understand why a

Latin@ Critical framework is paramount for this study, I first briefly review the background of this theoretical lens. Second, after the background has been reviewed, the ways in which LatCrit theory has been used in studies with a Mexican-origin population is reviewed.

### **LatCrit Background**

Latin@ Critical studies are a “branch” of the wider known Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory has its roots in an academic movement called Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which originated during the late 60s, early 70s as a reaction in the legal academic community to the fact that “in a nation dedicated to individual freedom ...some laws face neglect, reversal, and outright repeal, while the discrimination they were designed to eliminate continues in the same or a more sophisticated form” (Freeman, 2000, p. 574). This lack of implementation and change was vividly portrayed by the haphazard efforts to desegregate public schooling after *Brown vs. The Board of Education*. Thus, CLS for the first time methodologically exposed the fact that certain laws were to be applied to a “certain few,” without any real intent to challenge and change the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 3). In this line of thinking, Ladson-Billings asserts that much of the ideology in CLS emanated from the work of the Italian political writer and philosopher, Antonio Gramsci and depended heavily on his concept of “hegemony” to describe the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 12).

In CLS, the concept of hegemony is key. Hegemony as described by Gramsci “is the proliferation...of a particular conception of the world, and of a particular way of life, which is, at the same time the process by which a ‘great State’ is founded” (Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002, p. 35). In Gramsci’s view, bourgeois (mostly white) civilization perpetuates itself through the operation of hegemony –i.e., through the activities and backlash politics and reforms of a vast

network of cultural organizations, political movements, and educational institutions that instill their conceptions of the world and values in every sector of society. However, one important point that must be brought to light is that the hegemonic concept is not monolithic, but flexible, accounting for societal changes. Hence, this concept does not rest “solely in the transmission and dissemination of ideas and views from the leading groups of society down to the subordinate strata” (Borg et al., 2002, p. 8), but more importantly, on the shaping of cultural norms. In this sense, “culture is about the production and legitimization of particular ways of life transmitted in school through overt and hidden curricula so as to legitimate the cultural capital of dominant groups, while marginalizing the voices of the subaltern” (p. 55).

By including the concept of hegemony in its epistemology and praxis, CLS added to the legal narratives of the 70s and early 80s the fact that: “we have witnessed hard-won decisions, intended to protect the basic rights of black citizens from racial discrimination, lose their vitality before they could be enforced effectively” (Freeman, 2000, p. 574). Adding to the many questions that CLS brought to the forefront of the continued segregation and discrimination of people of color, it also added to the themes of qualitative studies the much debated concept of a racialized society.

Starting in the 1980s, researchers from different walks of life have used CRT in order to analyze their studies. Lawyers, researchers, theorists, and epistemological revolutionaries such as Mari Masuda, (Matsuda, 1991; Matsuda, 1996), Derrick Bell, (Bell, 1992; Bell, 2004) Alan Freeman, (Freeman, 1988), Richard Delgado, (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), Charles Lawrence, (Lawrence & Matsuda, 1997) Patricia Williams, (Williams, 1998) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1988) have confronted head-on the forbidden subject of race as an inevitable part of the social-emotional and historical-present of the national makeup. The

topics they have studied and hypothesized for and against have been eclectic, yet thematic, encompassing common areas that include: The construction and deconstruction of race in American society (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Williams, 1998), the hierarchical and disabling financial structures taking place in our system of taxation (Abreu, 2000; Rubin, 1996), Chican@ studies using counter-narratives (Pizarro, 1999; Villegas, 2002; Villegas, 2009), the structure of the Latin American family (Hidalgo, 1999), the deconstruction of gender at the intersection of race (hooks, 1990; Wing, 1996); and the challenges to affirmative action in colleges (Aguirre, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

CRT became not only an analytical tool, but a methodological one as well. By introducing the usage of storytelling, narratives and counter-narratives to receive the insight of those who have been marginalized, ignored, and silenced, CRT allows the participants to tell and/or name their own realities without the interpretation of the researcher; in other words, it is a theory of empowerment. CRT is a powerful tool to begin an interdisciplinary and multi-faceted analysis of race/class/gender and socioeconomic status because at its core it aims towards achieving social justice. However, out of the need to address not only the racialization of American society but also to include the unique experiences of the increasing number of Latin@s in the U.S., scholars lifted the concept of Latin@ Critical theory (LatCrit) out of the cradle of CRT (see Figure 1).

While LatCrit has its roots in CRT, its focus is to expand the concept of race outside of the white/black binary, to more accurately depict/explain/account for the experiences of Latin@s in this new American diaspora. More importantly, LatCrit aims to reflect and/or relate to individuals who are marginalized by being deprived of the right of citizenship, i.e., undocumented people. LatCrit provides the opportunity, as explained by Tara Yosso and Daniel

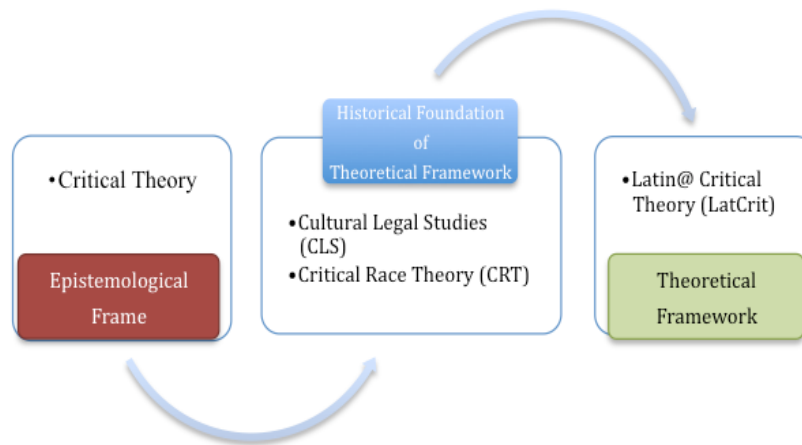
Solórzano (2001), to move away from the racial focus and instead work at the “intersection of race, gender, and class” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 596), and in this study, immigration status. While some researchers speak of the integration between CRT and LatCrit theories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), in this study, LatCrit takes precedence because it focuses on making “clear how Latino students become recipients of the fury of an anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, xenophobic rhetoric that is gripping the nation and turning back the clock on the gains made for civil and human rights” (Villegas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999, p. 35).

### **Applying LatCrit**

LatCrit allows the researcher to draw on the explicit knowledge and experiences of undocumented youth by including a variety of methods including: Storytelling, biographies, and narratives (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). To this point, the bulk of LatCrit studies have centered on Chican@ studies and have not yet reflected the eclectic nature of the Latin@ immigrant experiences in the U.S. However, within the LatCrit literature, the work of Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal are clear examples of the dialectical nature of LatCrit. To illustrate, in two separate studies in which they analyzed the transformative power of public resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and presented a critical analyses of Eurocentric narratives (Delgado Bernal, 2002), Delgado-Bernal and Solórzano realized that using a LatCrit framework allowed them to understand that Latin@ youth “live between and within the layers of subordination ...this means that their resistance must be examined at an intersection that includes language rights, cultural rights, and the influence of immigration status” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 335).

In this study, LatCrit theory aids in exploring the many present barriers that undocumented Mexican youth face. As Gloria Anzaldúa expressed in her book *Borderlands/La*

*Frontera: The new mestiza* (Anzaldúa, 1999), Latin@ identity and experiences cannot be captured by rigid categories and spectrums, this is especially the case for unauthorized Latin@s whose identity is situational, constantly malleable, historically produced, politically positioned and very much dependent on immigration status.




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Figure 1: Epistemological connection between critical theory and Latin@ critical theory

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

As a whole, there are two important concepts that undergird this study: First, the history and concept of *undocumentedness*, and second, the importance of aspirations in a youth's life. Undocumentedness is examined not only in light of the youth's perspectives, but in addition to the socially constructed history of this condition. This is accomplished first by looking at the history of undocumented immigration to the U.S. and the ways in which federal immigration policies have acted to increase this phenomenon. In addition to closely regarding the many aspects linked to undocumentedness, it is also important to structure this review within the context of being a Latin@ in the U.S. While being undocumented and being Latin@ are not synonymous, undocumentedness, as will be shown in the historical review, has been interwoven by historical, economic and political conditions in and outside the U.S., with being Latin@, and more specifically, with being Mexican.

Following the historical analysis, the concept of aspirations is reviewed in order to shed light on the process of aspiration formation and the ways in which having high aspirations can ultimately lead youth to higher levels of academic achievement and subsequently better opportunities for upward mobility (Mau & Bikos, 2000). Next, the literature on the aspirational barriers that Mexican-origin youth face is reviewed in order to focus on the main issues affecting the aspirations of this immigrant group.

## **History of Undocumented Labor and Migration**

The history of undocumented immigration to the U.S. is clouded in darkness because immigration tales are often told by those who have never experienced being an immigrant in their own lifetime, much less an undocumented one. The history of becoming and being undocumented has been severely neglected and almost de-historized in the annals of American immigration. However, based on the theoretical framework for this study, it is imperative to determine the historical and legislative pathways that unauthorized immigration has taken because illegality is a historically constructed condition. For this reason, this unique and “mythical” history has been divided into three major important time periods; first, the period between 1860-1920 is analyzed as a foundational stage. The era between the 1920s to the 1960s is introduced as a continuation and exacerbation of the patterns put forth during the preceding decades, and finally, the transformative 1980s are reviewed in light of the progressive force of the amnesty program.

### **The First Wave 1860s-1920s**

The practice of recruiting cheap laborers is not exclusively a historical practice of the Southwestern states of California and Texas, but in actuality dates back to the time of slavery and to the many Union states involved in this practice. Yet, within the annals of immigration laws, the practice of utilizing inexpensive labor dates back to 1864 with the Labor Contract Act and 1868 with the Burlingame Treaty. The passage of the 1864 Labor Contract Act was induced for two main reasons: The scarcity of a labor force after the Civil War and the expanding industrialization of all sectors of the labor market (Purcell, 1995, p.25). The Labor Contract Act allowed employers to recruit foreign workers by paying their transportation costs and then by

requiring them to work for a period of time for no wages until they could repay the transportation debt and their subsistence costs, practically putting them under virtual servitude (Graham, 2006). In spite of the many benefits that this type of labor provided to the increasing manufacturing sector of the American labor market, the National Labor Union (NLU) began to feel threatened with the huge oversupply of cheap foreign workers, mostly of European descent, leading to the repeal of the Labor Contract Act only four years later in 1868 (Commons & Andrews, 1916).

Following the Labor Contract Act, the Burlingame Treaty in 1868 became the first official agreement between a foreign nation, i.e., China, and the U.S. to bring laborers into the country in a controlled manner by guaranteeing free migration, travel and even residency privileges in order to help satisfy the U.S.' growing demand for workers in the railroad, mining, and agriculture industries (Katznelson & Shefter, 2002). Such attractive provisions naturally led to the increase of Chinese immigrants, many of whom were willing to work in wretched conditions, a fact which many employers abused. The Burlingame Treaty later resulted in the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, when virtually all Chinese immigration came to a halt because it was believed that Asian immigrants were driving wages to a substandard level and most horrifyingly of all "taking jobs away from White Americans" (Green, 2003, p.53).

The Chinese Exclusion Act set the tone for the labor patterns that would plague the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Immigrants would be regularly included and excluded, used and abused, while American citizens would increasingly see them as "biologically and inherently inferior" (Gompers, McBride, & Green, 1922, p. 824). As these patterns emerged, immigration began to be seen by an increasing numbers of Americans, not as a potential source of national benefit by generating economic growth and cultural diversity, but instead, as a burden on the economy. Furthermore, Americans also began to perceive that they were bearing the brunt of supporting

those “overly fecund,” yet eager to work at any wage immigrants who were stealing jobs and depressing the American standard of living (Ravitch, 1974, p. 174).

In the decades starting in the 1920s, Mexican workers became the hub of migrant and/or seasonal worker programs which strove to relieve employers, especially in the agribusiness sector, of the much needed cheap labor they required to subsist. One of the most significantly extensive and drawn-out recruitment of seasonal worker programs began in the late 1910s under the title the Bracero program.<sup>1</sup> While official immigration statistics on Hispanics at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are inexact because statistical records for this group were not kept before the 1900s, the data collected after 1908 shows that most Hispanic immigrants at this time were of Mexican descent and mostly went to Texas (Dillingham, 1911; Donato, 1997).

Mexican immigration at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became exponentially possible because the Texan region had gone from cattle-raising to cotton and vegetable producing (San Miguel Jr., 1987, p. 13). As a result, throughout the period between the 1900s-1920s there was an increased demand for cheap labor; leading Texan and California landowners to begin recruiting Mexican workers by the thousands (p.14). During this time “over one million Mexicans came to the U.S. during the first major wave from the 1890s to 1930s” (San Miguel & Donato, 2010, p. 28). Also contributing to the increases in Mexican immigration during this time was the 1910 Mexican revolution which triggered the migration of over 600,000 Mexicans as enumerated by the 1920 U.S. Census, this figure almost tripling the previous decade’s number from 224, 275 to 651,596 (Ngai, 2004, p. 52).

Targeting Mexican nationals, the first Bracero program took place from 1917-1921 closely following previous patterns of labor shortages during wartime, internal conflicts in the Mexican nation, and an increase in the needs of the agribusiness sector in the Southwest. However, this

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<sup>1</sup> Bracero comes from the Spanish word Brazo, which means arm, i.e., Bracero literally means a hired hand/arm.

program was to be short-lived since by the end of 1921 Congress passed laws severely restricting immigration, and in 1924 it established the U.S. Border Patrol to control cross-border population flows (Dent, 2002). In spite of this, agricultural workers were in such demand that these efforts were largely ignored by area employers. This would later lead to the creation of a different immigration wave, this time of migrant workers, and later of undocumented laborers (Romero, 2008).

The Labor Contract Act, the Burlingame Treaty, and the first wave of the Bracero program set the precedent for immigration labor patterns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, this blueprint underlined that laborers were brought in only when needed, to be later victimized and exploited, and shortly after, repatriated or discarded.

### **The Second Wave 1920s-1960s**

In the history of U.S. immigration, there have been two Bracero programs; the first one was officially instituted from 1917-1921, and the second one from 1942-1965 (Lee, 2003, p. 104). These programs consisted of a series of agreements between the U.S., and Mexican governments legalizing and controlling the movement of Mexican farm workers into the U.S (p. 104). The Bracero program began as a measure to cope with the severe labor shortages in agriculture created first by the lack of available laborers because of population shortages in many American cities, and second, by the millions of workers who left the farms for the high-wage wartime production jobs in metropolitan areas during War World I and II (Calavita, 1992; LeMay, 2007).

Faced with growing labor shortages brought about by World War II, the U.S. and Mexico negotiated the Bracero Program in 1942. The Bracero contracts were controlled by independent farmer associations in the Southwest and by the Farm Bureau. The contracts between the braceros and the farmers were in English and most braceros would sign them without

understanding their full rights and the conditions of employment. When the contracts expired, the braceros were required to turn in their permits and return to México. The braceros could also return to Mexico in case of an emergency, but only with the written permission of their boss (Lee, 2003; Navarro, 2009).

The second Bracero program, 1942-1964, lasted beyond the war years, leading Americans to begin a debate on the benefits and disadvantages of the program. As a result of the increasingly negative tide of public opinion turning against migrant workers, policies were implemented to curtail the number of seasonal workers staying all year round. Operation Wetback (1953-1955), was meant to “round-up and send back” approximately one million Mexican farm laborers (S. Lee, 2003, p.609). To amass national support, Operation Wetback was mostly characterized in the media as a national necessity to protect the country against the thousands of illiterate “aliens” that were crossing the Mexican border to take jobs away from American workingmen (A. M. García, 2002). This resulted in the ultimate deportation of more than three million Mexicans throughout the 1950s, many simply because they looked “Mexican” (García, 1995; Saito, 1998, p. 137).

While Operation Wetback did not end the Bracero program, it resulted in the overall portrayal of Mexican laborers as expendable when they no longer suited businessmen, national conditions, the government, and the American people. Hence, taking into account the fact that labor shortages had decreased by the beginning of the 1960s and that American citizens were increasingly interested in the protection of human and civil rights, the Bracero program officially ended in 1965, twelve years after Operation Wetback. However, by this time, an estimated five million Mexican workers had participated in the Bracero program and had formed strong bonds and families in the U.S. (LeMay, 2007, p. 4).

Thus, for over twenty years the Bracero program and the American labor market welcomed Mexican nationals to find jobs on this side of the border. However, when the controlled entry of temporary farm workers was stopped by Operation Wetback, it was inadvertently replaced by the flow of unauthorized immigrants, particularly from Mexico, who had been coming unregulated for years. As a result, the period from 1965 to 1985 has been defined by some as “the era of undocumented migration” and of a “de facto guest worker program” which brought thousands of young undocumented persons from Mexico to work in the U.S (Massey, Duran & Malone, 2002, p. 41).

The increase of unauthorized immigration post-1960s reflected the slow fossilization of major historical trends of inclusion and exclusion which had begun as early as 1864 with the Labor Contract Act (the act to encourage immigration), and later with the Burlingame treaty and its subsequent repeal in 1882 and in 1885 with the Chinese Exclusion Act. In addition to exclusionary immigration restrictions, and the shifts in the structure of the U.S. labor force (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995; Morris & Western, 1999), the following three conditions also combined to launch a new immigration era after the passage of the 1965 immigration reform: First, the insatiable demand for cheap labor during the 40s and 50s which had brought thousands of Mexicans to the Southwest; second, the fact that employers, especially in the agribusiness sector, had effectively become “addicted” to the profits associated with the cheap labor of migrant workers; and third, the changing demographic and economic conditions in Mexico which pushed many to look north as their only alternative for progress.

By the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, Mexico had survived an extremely volatile government, beginning with the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in 1876, and ending with the monopoly of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario

Institucional -PRI) which maintained absolute power over Mexican affairs until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the political unrest around presidential elections that were usually preceded by military uprisings, Mexican nationals endured a lack of industrialization; a fading agrarian economy; (Cafferty San Juan, Chiswick, Greeley, & Sullivan, 1983; Samora, 1971) and a steady population increase from 13.6 million in the 1900s to 35 million in 1960, and reaching 100 million in the year 2000 (Brookfield & Parsons, 2007, p. 160). These factors combined with America's call for cheap workers to effectively start a new immigration wave.

Consequently, the U.S. entered the 1960s having been affected by previous immigration waves, changing economic, political, and demographic conditions in Mexico, a history of internal labor shortages exacerbated by the U.S.' continuous involvement in world affairs following War World II, and the new ideological ideas of equality and tolerance exemplified by the civil rights and women's movements. However, while the immigration influx post-1960s was driven by a combination of the abovementioned factors taking place in and outside the U.S., these conditions later merged with new immigration laws to create another immigrant wave, this time of undocumented immigrants. The new wave was "kick-started" with the Immigration and Nationality reform of 1965 which opened up large-scale immigration from countries which had been denied entry by laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), the Gentleman's Act (1908); and the Immigration Act (1924).

Spurred in great part by the liberal ideological climate of the 1960s, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act/INS Act Pub.L. 89-236) abolished the national quotas which had been set in the Immigration Act of 1924 and substituted hemispheric caps: 170,000 for the Eastern Hemisphere and an added 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere, with a limit of 20,000 annually from any nation (Martin, 1982). These caps seemed to set an annual limit of

290,000 on immigration, but that was an illusion because there were provisions for immigrants outside of numerical limits (Rong & Preisslee, 1998). The new law expanded the categories of family members who could enter outside of the numerical cap and reserved most of the enumerated slots for more distant family members. For example, even today, seven out of ten legal immigrants come to join close family members, some of whom may be U.S. born or naturalized citizens (De Haymes & Kilty, 2007, p.106).

Therefore, the legacy of massive temporary worker programs sponsored by the governments of the U.S. and that of the sending countries has been long-lasting and fourfold: First, they have served to “plant the seed” of possible employment and progress in the minds of prospective immigrants willing to work hard. Second, they heightened a worldwide view of the U.S. as the place where endless work and opportunities for upward mobility await those who work. Third, they have created in American’s minds a popular perception of the undocumented worker as a criminal agent, violator of the law, “wetback,” unable and unwilling to speak English, only interested in earning and sending remittances to their home countries. Fourth, since most unauthorized workers even today are Mexican, this has additionally served to position other Latino groups in a subordinate position and into a neocolonial status which has virulently persisted into today (Gonzales, 2005).

It is an unmistakable fact that the Bracero, as well as restrictive measures such as Operation Wetback, stand as clear examples of the inviting, yet exclusionary attitude that the U.S. has had towards Mexican immigration, legal and illegal. But while the consequences of the Bracero programs are sometimes ignored, the consequences of the 1965 Immigration Reform cannot be overlooked. The introduction of numeric caps on the Western Hemisphere at a time when the pressure to migrate out of Latin American countries, and more specifically from Mexico had

increased, simply forced many to enter the country illegally (Cafferty San Juan & Engstrom, 2000). Entering the 1980s and 1990s not only were there not enough visas for all of the immigrants who wanted to come, but the situation created huge backlogs, again forcing those who could potential migrate legally to immigrate illegally (p. 41). This wave of unforeseen problems have caused serious immigration increases beginning in the late 70s, and continuing throughout the 80s and 90s, decades that have been labeled the era of undocumented immigration.

### **The Third Wave 1980s-Present**

Yet another cataclysmic change in immigration occurred as a result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act (Pub.L. 99-603). This act allowed thousands of Mexican unauthorized workers, as well as other immigrants and their families, to become legalized residents of the U.S. With one stroke of the pen, Congress recognized that undocumented immigrants benefited the U.S., but wanted to further discourage unauthorized immigration especially in a time of economic recession (Connolly, 2005). The amnesty provision enabled immigrants to adjust their status, if they met the requirements under the general amnesty provisions, the Legally Authorized Workers (LAW) or the Special Authorized Workers (SAW), both of which contained different residency and working conditions in order to apply for status adjustment (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2003). The passing of IRCA was a welcoming sign in cities like New York where Mexicans completed the second-highest number of amnesty applications, just behind Dominicans who roughly completed about 12,000 applications (Kraly & Miyares, 2001). When the program ended “nearly 2.7 million persons were granted amnesty, about three-fourths of whom were from Mexico” (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2003, p. 439).

Undoubtedly, the amnesty provided a way out for those immigrants who had been caught in a circulatory migration pattern by allowing them to permanently settle in the U.S., and consequently, to begin bringing their families under the family reunification plan that was already in place since 1965. While helpful to millions of unauthorized immigrants, IRCA created a series of unforeseen problems. One of the major oversights was the fact that the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 had set specific caps for the number of immigrants that could enter the country; these caps were set in accordance to the immigration levels of 1960s, and although immigration had increased by the 1980s, these caps have been maintained with some minor increases in each hemisphere (Massey et al., 2002). Therefore, it was inevitable that the 2.7 million amnesty beneficiaries began clogging immigration offices with applications petitioning their relatives (Massey, 2008). However, these applications could not be processed in a timely manner because of a shortage of human resources, but most importantly, because the Department of Immigration and Naturalization did not have the number of visas available and overall resources for the increasing number of applicants. These chaotic circumstances resulted in immigrants who desperately waited for their family members for years on end. This led many, who came to see this situation as unjustifiable, to bring their relatives by any means necessary, i.e., unauthorized if need be.

Ten years after the passage of IRCA increases in immigration began to rapidly surface, since the amnesty provision had given over two million amnestied the possibility of bringing their relatives and to geographically relocate as the opportunity to search for jobs in non-traditional immigration labor markets and places became more readily available without the fear of deportation (Durand, Massey & Charvet, 2000). Consequently, IRCA heralded a new era that expanded immigrants' prospects for employment and of hope for eventually reuniting with the

rest of their family in the States. This law, combined with the increasing financial instability in Mexico, subsequently prompted more Mexican nationals to cross the border, thereby forcing the Federal government to increase border security in order to stop undocumented people from crossing at traditional and non-traditional points (Cerrutti & Massey, 2006).

After the passage of IRCA not only did the country experience an increase in immigration, but also of terrorist fears and an outright rejection of public subsidies such as the welfare system, which made undocumented immigrants particularly vulnerable. This climate ushered in yet again a new era of legislative restrictive reforms, this time not only to include immigration with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, but also anti-terrorism with The Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) in 1996, and welfare reform with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA) also in 1996. In combination, IIRIRA and PRWOA created significant departures from the immigration policies of 1965. The enactment of the 1965 immigration reform had increases the rights of those who wished to immigrate and opened up large-scale immigration from regions that had previously been denied entrance, i.e., Japan, and others which had been ignored, i.e., Latin America. Post-1986 legislation limited the entry of legal immigrants, especially those from Latin America, and prevented the entry of unauthorized workers by criminalizing their illegal status and by further diminishing their rights.

In the post IRCA era, IIRIRA presented a dramatic shift by drastically reducing unauthorized immigration, by adding more border patrol agents, and introducing a pilot system by which employers could check newly hired employees' immigration status, effectively changing the term "deportation" to "removal" (Hagan & Rodriguez, 2008). IIRIRA also called for the installation of physical barriers such as a 14-mile multilayered fence south of San Diego

(Lee, 2003). This barrier extended a practice that had begun in 1993 —that of blocking traditional crossing points usually found near or within cities (p.764). In this way undocumented people's crossings were relegated to non-traditional, isolated and dangerous areas such as the desert. The massive buildup of agents, fences and technology along the border began to force unauthorized immigrants to walk longer distances in more treacherous terrain in order to cross. To illustrate, July 2010 became one of the deadliest months on record for undocumented immigrants crossing in Southern Arizona, when 59 bodies ended up at the Pima County Medical Examiner's Office (McCombs, 2010). IIRIRA was also different from previous immigration reforms because it introduced three radical changes to the law: First, it expanded the definition of deportable crimes; second, it made deportation retroactive; and third, it removed undocumented immigrants' right to seek appeal in front of an immigration appellate judge (Massey et al., 2002). Another unintended consequence of IIRIRA has been to push unauthorized immigrants to look for jobs and settle in non-traditional immigration areas mostly for fear of being apprehended in immigration raids in areas with a large concentration of immigrants (Massey et al., 2002).

The passing of IRCA in 1986 signaled major restrictions, and at the same time, provided a new life for the thousands of undocumented immigrants who applied for legal residence under the amnesty provision. IRCA made it clear that the U.S. was ready to propose and pass major legislation in the hopes of stopping more immigration waves, documented and undocumented, while at the same time trying to alleviate public concerns over competition for basic resources. In the end, IRCA did not meet its goal of stopping and/or curtailing immigration, authorized and unauthorized. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), the Hispanic foreign-born population grew at a faster rate than native Hispanics between 1990 and 2000 with foreign-born

Hispanics experiencing an 81 percent increase compared to 50 percent for native Hispanics. Overall, 40 percent of all Hispanics in the U.S. are foreign-born (Guzman, 2001).

Those who continue to enter the country illegally do so following the myth that the U.S. has unlimited opportunities for progress. This inevitable human drive —the drive for progress— is so ingrained in the minds of prospective immigrants that they are willing to risk their lives in order to migrate. However, this drive now combines with the restrictions passed under IIRIRA and post 9-11 reforms, to create a migratory set of laws that is no longer suitable for immigrants. The dream of coming to the U.S. within a reasonable amount of time has become a nightmare for thousands of people. In addition, those who enter the country illegally no longer have any real possibilities of legalizing their status, unless they go back to their countries of origin, which for many means leaving their new families in the U.S.

### **Contemporary Implications of the Three Waves**

Beginning with the first federal immigration act in 1924 and continuing with present day struggles to reform the immigration system, U.S. policies have demonstrated an inability to satisfy the country's real and practical immigration needs. "Some analysts suggest that this [inability] is due to the difficulty of controlling through legislation what is essentially an economically driven phenomenon" (Calavita, 1994, p.77). Ironically, while the U.S. has looked to "get rid of" the undocumented problem by any means necessary, it now has the largest number of undocumented immigrants in its history, —"a clear indictment of the failed immigration policies currently in place" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 363).

While the government continues to fail to look back and reflect on the mistakes of the past in order to build an immigration reform package that would benefit the entire country, unauthorized immigrants continue living with the stigma that they are "criminal aliens" or

“wetbacks” looking to take jobs away and lower the American standard of living. Any immigration reform worthy of the name must reflect the underlying reality that the American economy continues to create hundreds of thousands of new jobs each year for low-skilled workers. Those jobs are being created in retail sales, food preparation, janitorial services, agriculture, construction, landscaping and grounds keeping. Nevertheless, undocumented immigrants have continuously been used as scapegoats during times of economic and national identity crises and by default are demonized and silenced. Such emotionally charged history is “laced with sociocultural prejudices that taint the prospects for a formal and lucid policy covenant that works with the ideas coming from those across multiple sites of the ideological axis” (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010, p. 9).

As briefly shown in this historical review, immigration has been facilitated, and at times even encouraged, for the economic benefit of the receiving country—the U.S. Yet, once unauthorized immigrants arrive, they begin to adapt to the conditions they face despite their condition of illegality, and begin to eagerly await an opportunity to bring their closest relatives. Once these immigrants settle, and in the case of those who took advantage of IRCA, once they obtain their legalization, they immediately petition their relatives in the hopes of uniting their families.

Those who come to the U.S. illegally do so for a variety of personal, familial and financial struggles in their country of origin, and make the dangerous journey, risking many times their own lives in search of better opportunities. Most times the search for a better life is not for the one making the crossing and/or journey, but for those who are left behind. Several studies have shown that undocumented immigrants make tremendous sacrifices in order to offer their relatives a better life, and those who settle eventually bring their close relatives, i.e.,

significant others and children to join them (Chavez, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995; Massey, 1986; McHugh, 1989). Additionally, those who enter the U.S. illegally are more likely to stay because of the expense and risk of re-crossing the border (Massey, 2008). Most importantly and most often ignored is the fact that undocumented immigrants bring with them their dreams, ambitions, and aspirations for a higher education and socioeconomic mobility. While a lot of parents are unable to fulfill these goals, the children brought into the country illegally are many times left to carry on their parents' aspirations.

### **Aspirations**

The ability to obtain a higher paying job is known to be greatly enhanced with the completion of post-secondary education. Some of the factors that contribute to young people's overall educational achievement and future career and/or job choices are the aspirations they have for their future lives. In this sense, educational and occupational aspirations are one of the most important factors shaping an individual's life choices (Kao & Tienda, 1998). In the U.S., a society in which education enhances personal and professional success, high educational aspirations are used to measure youths' desire and ability to benefit from the connection between education and upward mobility. Therefore, this part of the literature review begins by defining the concept of aspirations and by emphasizing some of the major factors that influence the formation of aspirations in immigrant youth, including: Real life expectations, familial influences, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and time-lived in the U.S. Following this review, the literature specifically connecting to the barriers that Mexican-origin youth face in achieving their aspirations is reviewed by emphasizing the three major factors which will be used to examine the findings in this study, i.e., discriminatory practices, gender-role expectations, and an ethnic minority status.

**Definition**

Aspirations are defined by Jenks and associates (1983), as the expectations and evaluations of one's opportunities within society (Jencks, Crouse & Mueser, 1983). Aspirations have been found to be one of the most important predictors for educational persistence, high school graduation, (Cardoza, 1991; Rumberger, 1983; St-Hilaire, 2002) college attendance, and overall educational achievement (Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Sanchez & Cardoza, 1985; Vasquez, 1982). Therefore, aspirations are an important component of peoples' motivation and subsequent achievement. This fact has been shown by studies which have looked not only at how aspirations are moderated by achievement, but also by variables such as gender, ethnicity, scholastic achievement, and socio-economic status (Duran & Weffer, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). In this sense, aspirations become important because they influence scholastic as well as occupational achievement (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Hence, understanding the core of the educational and professional aspirations among a single ethnic and immigrant group, i.e., undocumented Mexican youth, is crucial in order to understand the ways in which their educational and professional aspirations may translate into different achievement outcomes when they are compared across different genders and ethnic groups.

Some seminal studies in the area of aspirations, such as those by Alexander and Cook (Alexander & Cook, 1979), have demonstrated that educational aspirations are not only driven by previous experiences, but also by the feasibility of continuing in school. Similar to this perspective, Jenks and associates (1983) conceived aspirations to be the expectations and evaluations of one's opportunities within society (Jencks et al., 1983). These views are consistent with the tenet that previous formal and informal education, as well as life experiences,

shape subsequent choices and outcomes. This point is particularly persistent throughout studies which have looked at Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrant youths of various ages and across generations (Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Crosnoe & Lopez Gonzalez, 2005; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; St-Hilaire, 2002; M. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). This literature has also shown that past attainments and educational experiences act as major predictors for future educational, occupational, and financial aspirations (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Chavez, 1994; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978). Therefore, it is logical to assert that aspirations are set “in accordance with what is expect[ed] on the basis of past training, performance and the opportunities offered by society” (Portes et al., 1978, p. 243). Consequently, while the formation of aspirations is influenced by a multiplicity of factors, there are some aspects which are particularly essential when considering immigrant youths, i.e., real life prospects, familial expectations, ethnicity, socioeconomic environment, and time-lived in the U.S.

### **Aspirations and Real Life Expectations**

An essential characteristic of aspirations is their unique relationship to realistic expectations and occupational attainment. In a longitudinal study, which did not disaggregate their data by immigration status, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) established an important connection between aspirations and life expectations in a youth’s life. Portes and Rumbaut highlight the dichotomy between aspirations, the “desired levels of future performance -what people want to happen,” and expectations, the “probable future state of affairs -what people think will happen” (p. 215). Portes and Rumbaut view aspirations as a less significant predictor of future outcomes since they ‘merely equate to dreams’ instead of what people realistically know they can accomplish. Nonetheless, their findings suggest a critical relationship between aspirations and

expectations which cannot be discarded —while the youths’ aspirations tended to be naturally high when compared to their realistic expectations, those students with high ambitions (aspirations) were the ones showing the most significant increases in educational expectations (achievement) over time (pp. 216-242). Thus, while the concept of “aspirations” in their study is associated with the “dream-like” ambitions of youth, it is shown to critically influence future life outcomes, decision-making, and achievement when moderated by the youths’ knowledge of any external factors that may potentially influence their ability to realize their future goals.

Not only is it important to emphasize that aspirations are an important framer of youths’ future educational and professional outcomes, but also the ways in which aspirations are related to real-life expectations. To exemplify, St-Hilaire (2003) surveyed over 700 Mexican descent students in the San Diego area to examine their values toward, aspirations for, and realistic expectations of pursuing a formal education, and found that “all but a handful of children of Mexican immigrants realistically expect to graduate from high school and a solid majority believe it within their reach to gain some college education” (p. 1037). These findings reflect that most students agree that education is the optimal means for socioeconomic advancement, — hence a key factor in getting ahead in the U.S. This study, while equally pointing to a gap between the aspirations and realistic expectations among students, shows that higher aspirations are continuously reflected in the youths who achieve higher outcomes. Similarly to St-Hilaire (2003) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001), Plunkett and Bacama-Gomez (2003) and Behnke, Piercy and Diversi (2004), the realistic choices and/or pathways that youth ultimately make and/or take represent a sort of compromise between their aspirations, interests, abilities, skills, values and the expectations, possibilities, opportunities, and limitations they perceive.

## **Aspirations and Familial Expectations**

Tara Yosso (2005) highlights that human and cultural capital are inexorably acquired first at the home; therefore, it is important to note that parents and the social environment also play a definite role in shaping the aspirations of youth. In this area, research has found that there is a clear relationship between the aspirations parents have for themselves and their educational level on the aspirations that youths develop in their own lives (Behnke et al., 2004; Clayton, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Plunkett & Bacama-Gomez, 2003; Qian & Blair, 1999; Teachman & Paasch, 1998; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). For instance, Benke, Piercy and Diversi (2004) conducted a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 Mexican-descent parents about their aspirations and found that when parents wanted to get a high school diploma, their children would consistently want to graduate from high school and go on to college; the opposite being the case for those families with lower educational aspirations.

Likewise, Clayton (1993) examined the influences of the family over the educational and occupational aspirations and decisions of Mexican-American students, and he found that parents had a significant influence over their children's future ambitions. Other researchers such as Teachman and Paasch (1998), and Qian and Blair (1999), have concluded that parental involvement in school activities has a positive impact on the educational aspirations of Latin@ students. More recently, Plunkett and Bacama-Gomez (2003), in their study of the relationship between gender, acculturation, and parenting on adolescents' academic outcomes, similarly determined that youths had higher academic aspirations when their parents were able to support and help with schoolwork. Combined, these studies not only signal the importance of parental aspirations/expectations and academic support for children's academic formation, but also point to the possible barriers which erase and/or counter the transfer of the high expectations that

parents have for their children. Some of these barriers include, but are not limited to: the parents' low level of human and cultural capital, their inability to help their children with their education, and a lack of monitoring and a supportive academic environment due in part to the pressures of their low socioeconomic status (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

### **Aspirations, Ethnicity and the Socioeconomic Environment**

While the expectations of parents are significant in forming aspirations, living in impoverished conditions, i.e., a low socioeconomic status, and belonging to an ethnic minority group, also affect the aspiration formation in youths (Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Luna de la Rosa, M., 2006; McLeod, 1995; Zsembik, 1996). To exemplify, in his ethnographic study of the "Brothers" (African-Americans) and the "Hallway Hangers" (White) both a group of disadvantaged young males in a housing project in upstate New York, Jay McLeod (1987; 1995) showed that the group with the lowest aspirations had lived the longest within an area of social deprivation, and therefore felt more reluctant to embrace the high educational aspirations that promised an escape from their present social class (Strand & Winston, 2008).

While the combined influence of a person's socioeconomic status and ethnicity on achievement and aspirations is still being studied through various lenses, living in poverty and/or belonging to a lower financial stratum has been found to contribute to basic economic hardships. These difficulties are exacerbated when individuals are undocumented and must solely rely on poverty wages, since a lower socioeconomic status limits the accessibility to information and resources available to youths about career options. For instance, Kao and Tienda (1998) and Luna De La Rosa (2006) found that students' lower educational aspirations are directly related to their perception of college as "unaffordable." Hence, the notion that a higher education is simply

out of their financial reach contributes in part to the lower aspirations of some minority groups (Hill et al., 2003; Zsembik, 1996).

Conversely, a higher socioeconomic status has been positively correlated to overall good grades, better math and reading scores, as well as higher educational aspirations (Rumbaut, 1996). Hence, the manipulative power of a low socioeconomic status is reflected in families who in their struggle to meet daily demands are unable to plan for their children's educational future. Financial struggles in the home then lead adolescents to feel pressure to drop out of school in order to work and help support the family (Mortimer, 2003; Rothstein, 2001). This, in addition to the lack of role models and tangible opportunities for advancement in their immediate environment, lead many youths to not have the necessary evidence about the future benefits of education and thus to become disenchanted and give up on their educational dreams (Jasinski, 2000).

Accordingly, a lower socioeconomic position and a person's ethnic minority status cannot be easily separated since these two factors in conjunction influence the aspirations of youth, as noted by McLeod's (1995) and Trusty's (2000) findings. Therefore, when a lower socioeconomic level is combined with an ethnic minority status "the perceived or actual impact of ethnic discrimination may limit the types of occupations that some ethnic minority youth believe are available to them" (Hill et al., 2003, p. 936). It is clear that students' educational aspirations are negatively influenced by their perceived barriers towards education (Ojeda & Flores, 2008) and future occupational achievement. Yet, ultimately, a lower socioeconomic position and an ethnic minority status do not seal a person's fate; after all, resilience is shown by individuals who endure great pressures. What makes a difference in surpassing barriers is a

person's perspective, —a negative outlook will inevitably transform minor obstacles into insurmountable mountains (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994).

### **Aspirations and Time-lived in the U.S.**

Yet another important influence on the aspirations-formation of immigrant youth is time-lived in the U.S. Grace Kao and Martha Tienda (1998) suggest in their study of the aspirations of ethnically diverse immigrant youth that the longer Hispanic students stay in school, the fewer educational aspirations they develop since they generate a fatalistic view of society as well they realize that they must overcome ethnic biases and that high aspirations do not necessarily lead to financial stability (p.375). While studies have found that children of immigrants express higher educational motivation and aspirations than do their peers from U.S.-born families at the time of arrival, even after accounting for their lower socioeconomic status (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), Kao and Tienda put forth that when youth perceive that their aspirations cannot be accomplished through education because the social setting offers them scant possibilities for advancement, then there is a disjunction between aspirations and achievement. This, may particularly affect undocumented students since they cannot easily escape the stigma of being illegal.

Consistently with Kao and Tienda's work, the sociologist Ruben Rumbaut (1996) also concluded that that there is a negative association between length of residence in the U.S. with both aspirations and academic achievement (Rumbaut, 1996). In the reported findings of another study by Rumbaut and Portes (2001) long-term residence significantly decreased school effort, hence, resulting in lower grades (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Additionally, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) report that as time goes by, undocumented youth must inevitably face the reality of their condition, and when this occurs, their ambitions are forever

altered (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Additionally, Zhou's et al., suggest that an undocumented status sets the stage for "differing aspirations and avenues for mobility" (Zhou et al., 2008, p.51). While Zhou's et al. study does not exclusively focus on unauthorized youth, it provides insight into the entrapped destiny of undocumented youth through some vignettes.

In Zhou's et al., Rodolfo, a Mexican-America youth who is desperately trying to achieve a better life and improve his educational and earning potential, soon realizes that those aspirations are severely blocked by his immigration status, despite the fact that he works 60 hours a week and has been in the U.S. since early childhood. Such stories abound in studies of newly arrived 1.5, first, and second generation immigrant studies, (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; M. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) but these narratives, while helpful in recognizing a distinct pattern of isolation and institutionalized neglect, do not exclusively focus on the undocumented experience and thereby present an incomplete picture, resulting in analyses that are applied to undocumented youth as a byproduct of studying immigrant communities.

## **Summary**

As shown in the literature there are many different kinds of pulling and pushing conditions which blend, merge, and conspire to debilitate and/or strengthen the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant youth (See Figure 2). The factors which potentially moderate youths aspirations and expectations are varied and include class (McLeod, 1995; Strand & Winston, 2008; Willis, 1977), parents' aspirations and levels of education, (Behnke et al., 2004; Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Carranza, You, Chhuon & Hudley, 2009; Ebers-Martinez, 2007; Nielsen & Fernandez, 1981), length of time in the U.S. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; St-Hilaire, 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), influence of peers (Gándara, O'hara & Gutierrez,

2004) as well as cultural values and work orientations (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). However, while the aforesaid factors moderate aspirations, perceived barriers also act as important deterrents for youths educational and occupational aspirations (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman & Gallagher, 2003; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). These barriers encompass the following: not viewing current school experiences as relevant and/or as vehicles for upward mobility (Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg & Roarke, 1997; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997), ethnic and gender discrimination (McWhirter, 1997), lack of parental time to instill cultural capital in the youth (Behnke et al., 2004), racism and a culture of non-caring and trust, (Valenzuela, 1999) and a lack of access to information (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

While it is clear that migration can potentially enhance a youth's opportunities and future choices, evidence suggests that the potential benefits of immigration may be eroded for undocumented children who are continuously exposed to having high aspirations but not able to achieve them. While most studies on aspirations have focused on the relationship between aspirations and school achievement, this study highlights the various and multilayered aspirations of undocumented youth in order to demonstrate that despite their condition of illegality, these youths have the potential to offer significant human capital to the communities in which they live.

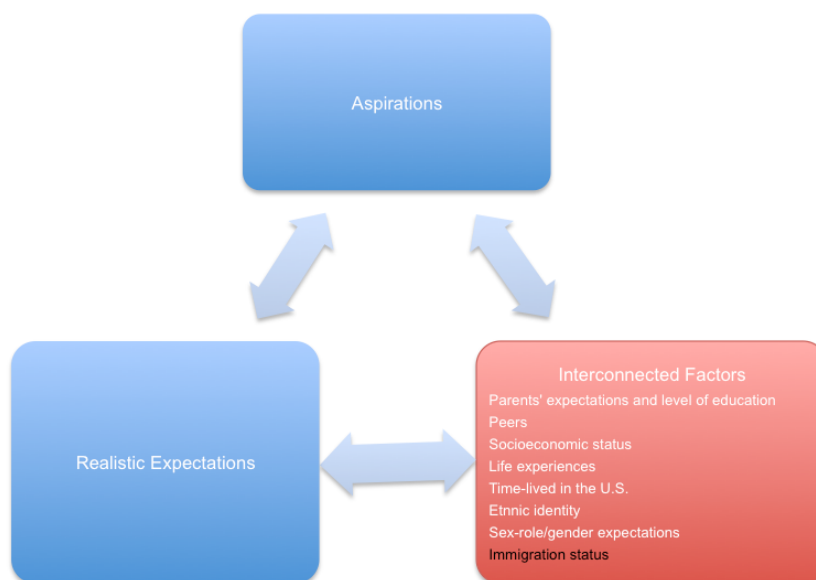


Figure 2: Interconnected factors that moderate and mediate aspirations, contributing to the cyclical nature of expectations and aspirations

### **Barriers to the Aspirations of Mexican Immigrant Youth**

Mexican-origin students have for decades contended with negative perceptions by school personnel, as well as by society in general, as lacking the linguistic, cultural, moral, and intellectual traits that the school curriculum demands (DeVillar, 1994). Consequently, “academic rewards in the form of status, power, prestige and socioeconomic mobility, which are thought to accrue to those individuals whose personal competencies and commitments make them eligible recipients,” (Allen, 1980, p. 67) have been mostly denied to Mexicans in the U.S. The studies that have reported the lower aspirations of Mexican-American students also point to some of the conditions driving this phenomena, such as the lower socioeconomic conditions and cumulative discriminatory practices (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Rumbaut & Cornelius, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), differentiation of gender roles, (Cardoza, 1991; Powers, Seltzer & Shi, 1998; Reyes, Kobus & Gillock, 1999), their level of acculturation (St-Hilaire, 2002) and

the influence of external expectations and stereotypes about their educational and occupational choices based on their ethnicity (Kao, 2000). Consequently, this section of the literature review examines some of the factors that significantly influence Mexican-origin students' aspirations: First, discriminatory practices; second, differences in sex-role/gender expectations; third, the effects of acculturation; and fourth, the influence of reception on ethnicity are reviewed as they form the basic analytic components in this proposed study.

### **Influence of Discriminatory Practices**

As early as the 1920s, scholars were asking questions about the seeming inability of Mexican descent students to perform well in school. Most times the answers to these questions would include that the children had some sort of 'mental retardation' and that parents' indifference towards schooling was not only appalling but partly to blame for such phenomena (Gould, 1932; Taylor, 1927). Widely known in the literature is the abundant practice during the first half of the twentieth century to use IQ tests to determine scholastic competence which serve to further stereotype Mexican descent students as mentally deficient, implying that they did not have what it takes to compete in the educational system (Valencia, 1997).

By the 1950s and 60s public rhetoric about the 'inability' of Mexican descent students to perform well in schools had moved away from deficit thinking and had entered the realm of the "culturally deprived" (Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002). For instance, in 1955, people like Helen Heffernan, Chief of the Bureau of Elementary Education in the California State Department of Education, conducted extensive research into the mysteries of the underperformance of Mexican-American students. In one of Heffernan's articles published by the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, she summarized the poor academic performance of Mexican students as a result of seven major factors: 1) low levels of aspirations,

2) lack of parental aspirations/support, 3) economic insecurity, 4) lack of belonging to the peer group, 5) lack of English language skills, 6) failure to recognize education as a venue for upward mobility, and 7) different cultural values from that of the “dominant society” and low community standards (Heffernan, 1955, p. 45). These conclusions were based on the experiences of “many qualified” persons on the subject, including teachers of Mexican descent, administrators, and social advocates in the Sacramento area. Note in the abovementioned reasons the fact that the lack of aspirations of both students and parents are placed front-end and deposit the onus for the lower achievement rates of Mexican youth on themselves, their families, and their cultural values, –not on any external causes that may be influencing their performance, such as the ways schools and the political economy are structured in ways that prevent some students from learning and succeeding.

This thinking had spread throughout the academic and public school circles by the 1950s and had proliferated over decades of mistreatment and segregation practices against the Mexican people and their children, more specifically in California and the Southwestern states (Valencia, 1997). This practice led to the fact that by 1968, “Mexicans comprised 40 percent of those tracked into programs for the mentally handicapped in California even though they constituted only 14 percent of the state’s elementary and secondary students” (Stern, 2005, p. 191). This unfortunate misconception has consistently led to the placement of many Mexican descent students in special education classes (Watson & Skinner, 2004) and in lower educational tracks (Donato, 1997) where low-ability skills are traditionally taught (Donato & de Onis, 1995; Oakes, 1985; Segura, 1993), a problem which persists into today (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). This history has led many Mexican-origin students to expect more ethnic discrimination in the workplace and anticipate more barriers to college entry and success (Kenny et al., 2003). On the

other hand, more recent literature has advanced the notion that “Mexicans have achieved a much higher degree of intergenerational mobility” and additionally move well beyond the socioeconomic status of their parents’ generation (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 41).

### **Influence of Gender-Role Expectations**

Several studies have delineated that there is a sex-role distinction between the societal and familial expectations for young men and women of Mexican descent. These differences have been summarized as the traditional values of *marianismo*, which suggests that women should sacrifice their individual needs and not question men’s authority in order to maintain the reputation and well-being of the family, and *machismo*, which defines the role of the man as the protector of the family (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). Nevertheless, these sex-role familial and societal expectations are always negotiated within the context of living in a low-income community and the ways in which a families’ socioeconomic status influence young people’s options and/or strategies for future advancement.

Many contemporary studies taking into account more post-modernist epistemologies have continued to look at the intricacies of the academic achievement of Mexican descent youth by challenging conceptions about their educational aspirations and abilities. A number of these studies have focused on the aspirations of female and male Mexican students (Cardoza, 1991; Chang, Chen & Greenberger, 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Reyes et al., 1999). For instance, Reyes, Kobus, and Gillock (1999) looked at the career aspirations of Mexican-American adolescent females in an urban Chicago high school and found that their aspirations departed from the norm in that many desired to be in more non-traditional, male-oriented careers, such as law, business, medicine, aviation, architecture and archeology. This group of girls equally aimed toward college and graduate school and were highly “focused, purposeful, informed and academically

able to realize the goals they articulated for themselves” (p. 379). Similarly, Gloria, Castellanos and Orozco’s (2005) study about the perceived educational barriers of Mexican-American women, found that contrary to the myth that Mexicans do not value education, the participants tremendously valued higher education and had aspirations of obtaining advanced degrees. Of additional importance is the fact that the participants were well aware of their educational barriers but almost all were optimistic in believing that they could overcome these obstacles (Gloria et al., 2005). These findings therefore challenge common beliefs about the educational aspirations and achievement of Mexican-origin girls by highlighting that despite the many negative stereotypes and structural barriers they face, many of these girls find ways to stay and succeed in school.

While many studies have focused on the educational and career aspirations of Mexican origin girls, others have examined the aspirations of young males, and have found that boys’ educational aspirations seem to be lower than that of girls (Cooper, 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Plunkett & Bacama-Gomez, 2003; Reyes et al., 1999). Some studies have attempted to explain such findings by highlighting that Mexican origin boys are socialized and driven to financially care (help) for the family much earlier and at much higher rates than girls, given traditional gender roles, which compel many to enter the labor market at an early age (Hill et al., 2003; Zhou et al., 2008).

Rumbaut (1999) in his study of the adaptation of children of immigrants in Southern California reported that Mexican-American male adolescents not only indicated relatively lower educational expectations, but also showed a decrease in expectations as high school graduation approached (Rumbaut, 1999). Similarly, a study by Chang et al. (2005), which looked at the ethnic, gender and generational similarities and differences of life goals among graduating

seniors, found that there were significant differences across gender lines. Females reported higher educational aspirations than boys, but in comparison to other groups, all Latin@s reported lower long-term educational expectations (Chang et al., 2006).

In another study by Gibson (1995), the differences between the high school graduation rates of girls and boys of Mexican-origin in a California town were startling: 69 percent of the girls compared to just 35 percent of boys were able to finish high school in 1995. This gender differential was explained because the students' track assignment upon entering the high school. Gibson found that twice as many boys than girls were placed into remedial math and/or English classes in the ninth grade. These findings, while signaling to an important difference between the educational aspirations and achievement of boys and girls, also attest to the discriminatory practices that still abound in public schools against Mexican-origin students and which may in great part explain the differential in these aspirations (Gibson, 1998). Taken as a whole, these studies delineate that the educational aspirations and achievement of young Mexican males seem to be depressed when compared to that of females. However, it is important to keep in mind that the educational aspirations of both young males and females are reactions not only to sex-role socialization, but also to cultural expectations, socioeconomic status and financial ability to support one's educational dreams.

### **Influence of Acculturative Factors**

Most research on the acculturation of immigrants has primarily studied the extent to which immigrant families adopt the values, beliefs, and practices of the host country as if this process were unidirectional. In this sense, acculturation has been traditionally defined in the literature as the phenomena which results when groups of individuals who have different cultures come into contact with one another, leading to subsequent changes in the original cultural

patterns of either or both groups (Cuellar & Arnold, 1995). Others have defined acculturation as changes in attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, knowledge, and identity (Gonzales et al., 2008; Graves, 1967). Markers of acculturation generally focus on generational status, English language proficiency, and length of residence in the U.S. But the acculturative process is never a linear or a singular process taking place at one point in time, instead it takes various forms depending on a groups' and/or individual's need to assimilate, integrate and/or separate from its surroundings, as well as the ways in which the receiving society constrains and directs acculturation options available to immigrants (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010).

In general, the ability of immigrants to acculturate is often determined by complex issues such as language, the ethnic-racial composition of the settlement area, as well as their own will and the reception of the dominant society (Alba & Nee, 2003). As a result, acculturation is a complex, multidimensional, multivariate process involving second language acquisition, country of origin, age of entry into the U.S., perceived ethnicity, background and ethnicity of individuals with whom the person socializes, socioeconomic status, educational level, sociocultural context, and family traditions and values (Siatkowski, 2007).

The level of acculturation into a host society can many times determine the level of academic achievement an individual uses to advance their socio-academic, socio-economic and occupational mobility. Therefore, "the process of acculturation results in direct lifestyle changes at the individual or group level" (García-Vazquez, 1995, p. 306). In terms of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., previous research has shown that acculturation significantly influences Mexican immigrant students' school achievement and academic aspirations (Carranza et al., 2009; Lopez, Ehly, García-Vazquez, & García-Vasquez, 2002; Ramos & Sanchez, 1995; M.

Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). To illustrate, Ramos and Sanchez (1995) and López, Ehly and García-Vázquez (2002) found that less acculturated Mexican-American high school students reported lower college aspirations than did their more acculturated peers, and that, as López et al. say, “the highly integrated [acculturated] individuals were found to have higher academic success” (p. 254). However, as explained by Lopez et al. (2002), the fact that the majority of the students were characterized as strongly Anglo-oriented may have been due to a strong perception that in order to survive in the dominant majority culture they needed to adapt to the values, beliefs, and cultural norms of the new environment.

The abovementioned works make a strong connection between acculturation, generational level, and the length of time an individual spends in the host community. Given this association, it is widely believed that as immigrants spend more time in the States they become more acculturated, and thus, more integrated into American institutions, —inevitably resulting in higher achievement rates. However, generational status and higher levels of acculturation do not automatically translate into higher aspirations and achievement rates (Ojeda & Flores, 2008). For example, Kao and Tienda (1998) and Rumbaut (1996) found that second-generation students had lower academic achievement than first-generation students. More recently, Crosnoe and Lopez-Gonzalez’s (2005) quantitative study, which used a random sample of 18,366 Mexican-American youth from 130 high schools in 80 different communities, suggested that the highest rate of academic failures occurred in the second generation, and that contrary to previous studies that have suggested a linear generational decline, (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Matute-Bianchi, 1986) Mexican immigrant youth have positive school functioning in the first generation.

Consequently, acculturation research has usually focused on the cultural changes of the dispossessed, and on the adaptation, assimilation, or integration of immigrants and other

minorities without taking much heed of the fact that the very term “acculturation” has been based on historical negative stereotypes about minority groups (Rudmin, 2010). Therefore, a more appropriate way of looking at acculturation is through the undocumented youths’ narratives — whether they have been able to recognize, have access to, and are willing to employ the cultural practices, beliefs, and tools that would make for effective participation in their specific contexts. Using this more holistic perspective opens up a new conceptualization of acculturation to include not only changes at the social setting, social network, institutional and policy levels (Tseng & Yoshikawa, 2008) but also the very important aspect of immigration status and the circumstances surrounding this migration.

### **Influence of Reception on Ethnicity**

Ethnicity here refers to the membership in a group that holds a specific heritage and set of values, beliefs and customs (Phinney, 1996). The influence of an ethnic-racial identification is connected to the ways in which a particular immigrant group is received and socialized by the host community. In this regard, this literature review has shown that Mexican-origin people have had to grapple with a long history of mistreatment and discrimination not only at the work place but also in schools. In trying to determine the effects of such discrimination on Mexican immigrant youth, some studies have determined that if an immigrant group perceives little discrimination, then their youth are more likely to easily integrate into the host society by taking more advantage of available opportunities (Schwartz et al., 2010). However, when young immigrants experience discrimination, they are likely to reject close involvement with the host community and be oriented towards their group associations (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006).

To illustrate, a public opinion poll conducted in 2000 (Cornelius, 2002) indicated that native-born Americans regarded Hispanic immigrants more negatively than immigrants from other ethnic backgrounds such as European, Asian and/or Canadian. Therefore, it is not surprising that ethnic minority groups, such as Mexican-origin immigrants, experience more discrimination and hostility from members of the receiving society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), a situation that is aggravated for Mexican-origin youth who are undocumented.

As a result of discriminatory practices that isolate Mexican immigrants to certain neighborhoods, certain schools, places of worship, recreation, and employment, these immigrants also experience what Rumbaut (2008) has termed a *reactive ethnicity* (Rumbaut, 2008). Reactive ethnicity refers to holding even more strongly onto one's cultural heritage and resisting the adoption of the host community as a protective measure. In other words, discrimination and isolation from the receiving community encourages ethnic minority immigrants to remain separated (Berry et al., 2006). These unwanted experiences painfully introduce the immigrant to his/her new role as a racialized commodity, and to the fact that their ethnic group may be regarded as unwanted, as is the case with undocumented Mexican youth. Furthermore, these youth must then contend with unfair treatment and stereotypical misconceptions about what they have to offer the receiving society (Schwartz et al., 2010). As shown by several studies (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Stepick, Grenier, Castro & Dunn, 2003; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) an unfavorable context of reception includes not only discrimination and lack of access to jobs and other social resources, but also being marginalized to poor and unsafe neighborhoods.

Immigrant Mexican youth cannot control and/or influence the mode of reception and their ethnicity; these are elements outside of their control. These youths cannot control where

their parents can afford to live and cannot do anything about the fact that the receiving society views them negatively. Still, for undocumented youth the negative mode of reception they experience and the many negative views about their ethnic minority status are not the only factors they must wrestle with. Many are also linguistically isolated and excluded from any institutions, formative opportunities, higher paying job prospects, and most importantly, the social networks that could enhance their human capital and eventually provide a way out of being trapped in a life of stagnant economic growth.

### **Summary**

As shown in the third part of this literature review, educational aspirations are critical to educational attainment because people cannot achieve what they do not first dream. The interest toward dispelling the aspirations-achievement/attainment paradox has been multilayered and includes studies that have examined many of the barriers towards the aspiration formation in Mexican immigrant youth. Given the importance of educational attainment in this global and technologically advanced world-wide community and acknowledging the high number of undocumented people that now reside in the U.S., this study explored the educational and occupational aspirations of undocumented youth by considering their narratives as they reflected the impact of their immigration status in relation to their future prospects. Hence, if aspirations are shaped from the diversity of exposure, experiences, perceived opportunities, and time-lived in the U.S., it is suitable to inquire as to the effects that being undocumented has on the learning and futures of undocumented youth.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Studying undocumented immigrant youth is challenging; however, it presented the participants with a unique opportunity to define themselves as opposed to having their experiences defined by others. This study raised important questions on whether the aspirations of two groups, who share the same ethnic background and socioeconomic status, would differ when their immigration status was taken into account as a significant variable in their lives. This information served as a point of departure to further inquire into how undocumented youth describe/experience their immigration status in light of the restrictive environment in which they operate and to inquire about the everyday needs, expectations and plans they have for their future lives.

Given the fact that undocumented youth have “less access...to the connections, resources, and other forms of social capital that promote” (Crosnoe & Lopez Gonzalez, 2005, p.3) higher aspirations and faster upward mobility, this study ultimately draws attention to the perceived and lived experiences of undocumented immigrant youth. Therefore, the methods in this study are grounded in conducting research as a multilayered process of scaffolding inquiry, meta-analysis, and sharing “thoughts and ideas, [while] valorize[ing] interpretative stances” (Lightfoot, 2000, p. 184).

#### **Restatement of Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the data collection and analyses of this study:

Central question:

How do undocumented Mexican youth aged 17-21 express their educational and occupational aspirations in comparison to documented youth, and how do they narrate their plans for the future?

1. How are the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?
2. What are undocumented youth's educational and occupational aspirations?
3. What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the educational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth?
4. Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school?
5. What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals?
6. How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?

### **Research Design**

In order to conduct an in-depth analysis and to explore undocumented youths' life aspirations and pathways to achievement, this study used a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods is research in which quantitative and qualitative techniques are mixed in a single study. Mixed methods research uses a combination of methods that have complementary strengths to aid in the process of triangulation as well as the strength of the overall design. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) defined mixed methods as "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4). A mixed methods approach was selected because it was important to first identify broad trends among the youth with respect to their aspirations and then use this information to conduct qualitative interviews. Hence, the mixed methods approach used in this study was sequential;

first, the quantitative data from the survey was collected and statistically analyzed. Second, this information was used to inform the second phase of the research—in-depth qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2009).

The quantitative approach that was used consisted of a survey method that collected similar data from a group of documented and undocumented youth to later make comparisons across these responses. This data was cross-sectionally collected given the difficulty in finding undocumented participants who would want to participate in a longitudinal study due to their immigrant status.

### **Independent Variables**

In this study the immigration status of youth, authorized and unauthorized, time-lived in the U.S., and gender were the independent variables which were explored to see if there were any differences in relation to the dependent variables, the level of educational and occupational aspirations of both groups, the documented and undocumented youth.

*Immigration status.* Immigration status was taken into account as a possible barrier in the lives of undocumented youth. An undocumented status forces many of the 65,000 unauthorized youth who graduate high school every year to continue living in the shadows of American society, in fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with marginal access to good jobs or a college education (Hiscott, 2005). For these students, reaching higher educational and occupational aspirations is usually only a dream since undocumented youth have no access to student aid, and in many other cases are even required by colleges and universities to pay non-resident tuition (Gonzales, 2007). Therefore, the participants' immigration status was determined by their self-reporting and coded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) as 1 for undocumented and 2 for documented.

*Time-lived in the United States.* The literature has also found that the more years some minority groups spend in the United States, the less educational aspirations they develop and the less educational achievements they display (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Kao, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 1999). At first glance, it appears that the longer an individual lives in the United States, the more opportunities h/she has to experience factors which could severely diminish their positive outlook on life, e.g., discrimination and segregation (McLeod, 1987; McLeod, 1995). Therefore, time-lived in the United States was used in relation to the youths' level of aspirations. Length of residency in the U.S. was measured by a single question in the demographic section of the survey which asked participants to report: "How long have you lived in the United States?" (Appendix B).

*Gender.* Gender differences were taken into account when looking at the aspirations of documented and undocumented youth. Gender was important because previous research has delineated that there seems to be a gender-gap between the educational achievement and educational aspirations of male and female students (Cooper, 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Given the fact that limited research has looked at the educational and occupational aspirations of undocumented immigration youth, including an examination of gender differences across both documented and undocumented youth elucidated important clues as to their aspirations. This information was collected in the survey and coded into SPSS as 1 for male and 2 for female.

## **Setting**

The name of the community from which the participants were selected is kept anonymous in order to maintain the identities and places of residence of the undocumented youth strictly confidential —only a generalized description is provided here. The youth in this community come from various Latin American countries, mostly from the Dominican Republic

and Mexico; while other countries are represented, their numbers are scarce in comparison with these two groups. From 1980 to 2000, the town's population grew approximately 30 percent transitioning from a mostly middle-to-upper-class neighborhood to a middle-to-lower-class neighborhood heavily occupied by immigrants of Hispanic descent.<sup>i</sup> This rapid increase is reflected in the area's more than 15 elementary schools, one middle school and one high school which serve a multi-ethnic enclave of old and new immigrants. The high school enrollment since 2000 has hovered around 2500 to upwards of 3000 students.<sup>ii</sup> Of these students in 2007, 17 percent were English language learners while the state of New Jersey averaged 4 percent in their total of English language learners.<sup>iii</sup> Given these internal changes, many of the original residents have moved to neighboring towns up to five to ten miles away, while some ethnic and religious groups such as orthodox Jews have opted to remain segregated on the outskirts of it.

This city's changing demographics and its inhabitants' reactions to such changes are representative of the transitions and sentiments of many individuals across America (Massey, 2008). It specifically embodies the changing ethnic and class dynamics brought about by the immigration waves of Latin@s within the past thirty years. Hence, this study took place in a city which not only exemplifies the changes that immigration has brought about, but the reactions to it from longtime residents and the impact of these reactions on the immigrants themselves. In addition, this setting served to contextualize youths' life aspirations as well as the pathways they use to navigate their lives in a town that struggles to find a balance between responding to longtime residents' sensibilities and immigrants' needs.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study (both undocumented and documented youth) were heterogeneously selected from the Mexican youth population presently living in a town in New

Jersey between the ages of 17 and 21 years of age. The selection of the participants was made from the town's Mexican population since Mexican nationals represent over 60 percent of the undocumented population in the United States (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009) and account for approximately 20% of this town's total population.<sup>iv</sup>

This study also equally targeted female and male participants since statistical records for the number of undocumented youth in the country show that they closely approximate each other with 710,000 males and 620,000 females, for a total of 1.3 million persons under 18 years of age (Hoefer et al., 2010). In the community from which the participants were selected, males and females account for 49% and 50% respectively of the population; therefore, equally targeting female and male participants was feasible.<sup>v</sup>

### **Sampling**

Since research with undocumented immigrants is inherently challenging due to the clandestine nature in which they live and the fact that the settings in which they can be found are relatively inaccessible to people outside the group, most studies done with undocumented immigrants use snowball sampling as a recruitment technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Chavez, 1994; Cornelius, 1982). Accordingly, the recruitment strategy in this study was to use several initial contacts with certain key undocumented youth in the community and then ask those contacts to refer other youth. These individuals were asked to voluntarily take an anonymous survey and if interested to participate in a series of interviews. The surveys taken by all of the undocumented participants were anonymous.

The documented Mexican youth who took the survey were recruited using the same technique above but were not recruited for any interviews since this study used the information from the documented youth in order to conduct an initial comparison. After this, the focus was

on the undocumented youth. The total number of documented and undocumented youth who participated in the survey was 125 and from this number ten participated in in-depth interviews.

## **Research Instruments**

### **Survey**

This study used two major instruments to gather the necessary data: First, a survey and second, a series of semi-structured interviews. First, the survey allowed me to examine any differences that might exist in the educational and occupational aspirations of these youth when immigration status was used as a dependent variable. The survey use asked questions about the youths' educational and occupational aspirations and expectations (Appendix B). This survey was given to both documented and undocumented youth between the ages of 17-21. The first part of the survey contains a demographic section in which participants reported their age, level of education, parents' level of education, place of birth, and time-lived in the United States. The second part is comprised of questions in a Likert-scale format where the participants indicated their reactions on a five-point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). In this questionnaire, participants answered questions in the following areas:

- Educational values and aspirations,
- Scholastic experiences,
- Life in the States,
- Life plans and
- Occupational aspirations and expectations.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

A total of twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and in a coffee shop. The interviews were based on a preliminary question protocol (See Appendices C and D) and proceeded in an open-ended manner that allowed the youth the opportunity to engage in a conversation that was flexible. The first interview gathered the youths' border-crossing stories and gave information that helped me to revise the protocol for the second interview. The second interview was semi-structured and answered any remaining questions left unanswered from the first section and served to gather information about the youths' future plans and foreseeable obstacles.

### **Data Collection**

After finding the participants willing to take the survey, the documented youth were given the appropriate consent and assent forms. The undocumented youth were given information sheets and gave oral consent to take the surveys and to participate in the interviews, as approved by the Institutional Review Board of the City University of New York (Appendix E). Once the consent forms were gathered, the surveys were given, collected, and stored in a locked cabinet. After the data from the surveys was gathered, it was analyzed in order to guide the next phase of the study. The total number of undocumented participants that took the survey was 63, and documented was 62. The total number of undocumented youth who agreed to participate in the interviews was ten, five males and five females.

To collect the interview data, I used a recording device with the participants' consent and later transcribed the interviews verbatim. This information, including personal reflections made during the interviews, was collected into three different memos: Literal, interpretative, and

reflexive. The literal memo included the interviews' transcription and notes on body language. The interpretative memo included inferences about answers, actions, and reactions of the participants during the interviews making connections to the research questions and theoretical framework. The reflexive memo included personal reflections on my role during the interview process and the questions and/or gaps that the interview raised in terms of the research questions. These memos were then cross-sectionally coded by themes and interview dates. The interviews took place over a period of four months starting in February and ending in June. After each interview the participants were given a transcribed copy of the previous meeting where they checked for the accuracy of the narrative.

## **Procedure**

### **Phase I**

1. Debriefed the participants and their respective guardians and obtained/collected the appropriate consent/assent forms and/or oral consent from the participants and their guardians based on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval guidelines for this study.
2. Administered the educational and occupational aspirations survey to a total of 63 undocumented and 62 documented participants.
3. Surveys were gathered, information coded and entered into SPSS for analysis.
4. Analyzed and interpreted initial findings before beginning the qualitative phase.

### **Phase II**

1. Scheduled and conducted initial interviews with ten undocumented participants.
2. Interviews were semi-structured and allowed interaction between participants and researcher.

3. After each interview ended; the audiotape was transcribed and the transcriptions brought to the following session in order to have the participants check the transcription for complete accuracy.
4. After the qualitative interviews were conducted, transcribed and checked for accuracy, cross-reference coding began focusing on emerging themes.
5. Coding schema and pertinent analysis including narratives were peer reviewed by a Columbia University graduate and Seton Hall college professor for accuracy.
6. At the end of this process, the participants were contacted to conduct member checks on the analysis of the data.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey helped in answering research questions 1) How are the educational and life aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?, 2) What are undocumented youth's educational and occupational aspirations?, and 3) What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the educational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth? (See Appendix A). Once the surveys were collected, they were coded and entered into SPSS and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used first to describe the basic features of the data gathered. T-tests were used to determine whether or not the groups would differ enough in their educational aspirations and to test each individual scale in the survey: Educational Values and Aspirations, Scholastic Experiences, and Life Plans. Three-way analyses of variance were conducted in order to determine any major differences between the two groups. To do this, the survey's Educational Values and Aspirations scales were used as the dependent variable. Another analysis of variance was conducted to see if immigration status, gender and time-spent

in the United States made a difference in the occupational choices of either group. A Kendall's Tau-b and a Spearman's rho test were then conducted for both documented and undocumented youth to see if there was a relationship between certain items in the survey. A test was also conducted to see if there were any specific correlations between certain items in the survey (Chapter IV).

Using the analysis from the survey, the interviews were conducted. Once the interviews were gathered, the transcriptions and the memos from these interviews were thoroughly read, examined, and the data systematically coded into three thematic topics: aspirations, barriers and achievement plans (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As recurring themes/phrases become apparent, I looked across other interviews to establish patterns and/or significant occurrences. As this data emerged, it was also cross-referenced with the reflexive and interpretative memos. Since qualitative analysis entailed a circular process of revisions and adjustments, the analysis was categorically and chronologically organized, reviewed and continually coded (Creswell, 2009). This data is presented in detail in Chapters V and VI where participants' names have been changed to maintain anonymity. Quotes from the transcriptions were used as examples to illustrate the identified themes and also used as counter-narratives to elucidate and document the role of aspirations and resilience in the lives of undocumented youth from a LatCrit perspective.

As part of the data analysis, the participants were asked to revise their transcripts and participate in member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). There were two stages of member checks in this study. First, the participants were asked to read the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy. Second, after all of the interviews were coded and analyzed, a final meeting with each of the participants was arranged to share the findings and to allow them to reflect and/or express their opinions, views, and feelings in regard to the conclusions. In addition, the final

analysis of the data was also checked by a peer reviewer who commented on the themes, meanings and interpretations generated while analyzing the data.

### **Validity**

To ensure the internal validity of the data collected, four types of verification were employed: 1) triangulation, 2) transcripts and analyses of the interviews were shared with the participants to gain feedback, 3) the coding schema was shared with a peer reviewer to gain further advice on the accuracy of interpretations, and 4) every step of the data collection and analyses process was made clear to the participants. As explained by Schwandt (2001), “triangulation is a procedure used to establish the validity or integrity of the conclusions being drawn by the researcher.” Indeed, “the central point of the procedure is to examine a conclusion from more than one vantage point” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). Triangulation is the combination of several qualitative and/or quantitative research methods, theories, observations and analytical techniques with the expectation that these different methodological and/or theoretical perspectives complement each other in ways that reveal “blind spots” and strengthen the value of the argument presented (Flick, 2006; Padgett, 2008). Triangulation in this study was implemented in the different types of data that were gathered: The survey from documented and undocumented youth, the interviews with the undocumented youth and the researcher’s memos. During the data analysis phase, the collected data continued to be triangulated by using qualitative and quantitative methods for analysis.

Additionally, the validity in this study was established by making every step of the research process as well as the connections between theory, data, and analysis explicit. Transparency was shown in terms of the selection of participants (how and why) as well as how and why certain analytical decisions were made during the study. Moreover, the usage of

member checks gave the participants the opportunity to read over transcripts and provide written and verbal feedback on any issues that arose.

In terms of external validity, this study did not look to generalize to populations of recently-arrived immigrants and/or to all undocumented youth in the state of New Jersey or the United States. This study is to be used as a point of departure to discuss the life aspirations of undocumented youth and the institutional barriers that limit their pursuit of a better life. Therefore, in this study, significance and generability refer specifically to the implications of these youths' overall stories in a wider societal context and by furthering public awareness of their condition and of the need for policy changes.

In addition to the aforementioned, this study also established credibility by building rapport with the participants by conducting more than one set of interviews. I formed strong bonds with the participants in order to alleviate some of the anxieties related to confidentiality. These bonds were forged over time and by my ability to engage with the youth at a level that they felt comfortable with. In order to facilitate this, I attended many Saturday and Sunday soccer games in the local park and attended the local church's religious activities and functions which gave me an opportunity to meet many of the participants.

I also addressed the issue of participant "misinformation" or what Mishler labels the "problem of distortion" (2009, p.313) by gathering more than one form of data. The problem of distortion, as defined by Mishler, entails participants who unconsciously or consciously provide answers that do not accurately represent their present state of affairs. In this study, the problem of distortion was taken into account by asking the participants to take a questionnaire and to also participate in a series of interviews. The interviews gave an opportunity to engage in in-depth

conversations with the participants and eventually dig deeper into some arising areas of concern and also to cross-reference interview data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All research entails the obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants. To an extent, conducting one-on-one interviews could be seen as obtrusive to some people. This is why the interviews were conducted mostly on an open-ended basis in order to build the appropriate rapport with the youth and to give them an opportunity to decide if they felt comfortable answering questions about their condition of illegality. Some of the risks for the participants in this study included some emotional discomfort in sharing personal experiences about being undocumented. However, participants were free to decline to answer any questions or to stop participation at any time. Another major point of consideration for this study was the fact that the population used lives on the margins of society, as such there was a moderate level of risk in their volunteering to participate and disclosing their immigration status. As a result, the following safeguards were employed to protect the participants' rights and well-being:

1. Due to their immigration status neither the parents nor the youths with an undocumented status were required to sign any papers which disclosed their names and provided any identifiable information which could put them at risk. A research exemption form was filed and obtained with the IRB of the City University of New York, Graduate Center requesting a waiver of written informed consent for the undocumented youth (Appendix E).
2. The research objectives were articulated verbally and in writing so that these were clearly understood by the participating youth and their parents (Appendix E). The debriefing was conducted in the language of the participants' choosing for clarity—in English or Spanish, and it included a description of how the data was to be used.

3. Stamped written permissions to proceed with the study, as articulated by the IRB, were given to the participants.
4. Verbatim transcriptions, written interpretations and reports were made available to the participants. In the written reports the participants' names and any other identifiable information and/or markers were removed.
5. The participants' rights, interests and wishes were considered first when choices were made regarding the reporting of the data.

### **Limitations**

This study had three main limitations. First, as previously mentioned, its results could not be generalized to the entire Mexican-origin undocumented population due to the limited number of participants used. The second limitation of this study was that it was not longitudinal but instead cross-sectional due to the difficulty in finding undocumented youth who would want to maintain a long-term relationship with the researcher. The final limitation of this study was my own identity and how this may influence the relationship between participant and researcher. This means that the lens through which the data was viewed and the conclusions drawn were subject to my own personal and professional biases. As a result, in the next section, I briefly discuss my background and its implications for this study.

### **Profile of the Researcher**

This research inquiry stems from a life-changing personal experience. When I was fourteen years old, my mother and I migrated to the United States. As a result, I had to leave my family members, friends, school, neighborhood, and customs; overall, I had to leave my way of life behind. Coming to America was an inspiring and significantly positive experience because I

was given the opportunity to learn a new language, to meet people from a variety of cultures, and most radically to pursue a higher education. But at the same time, being an immigrant was extremely difficult as I faced several difficulties: Not speaking English, discrimination, growing up in poverty and receiving a mediocre academic preparation. All of these factors severely limited my exposure to the important cultural and human capital that I would later need.

After attending college in an inner city school and working part-time to pay for my education, I eventually became an English as a second language teacher in an urban school with a high population of recently arrived immigrants. Being a teacher for over nine years has made me aware of the challenges that schools, students, and the community must struggle with on a daily basis. Thus, I believe that being an immigrant, having grown up in poverty, receiving poor academic preparation, living in a single-parent household, having a mother with low educational, cultural and human capital, and having experienced many of the other hardships that undocumented immigrants face, allow me to understand and to accurately portray undocumented youths' stories as they may at times reflect my own struggles. For instance, similar to my own experiences, many undocumented students are rejected for not speaking English, but most virulently, their condition of illegality exposes them to ridicule and to a life of secrecy. Conversely, unlike my own experiences, most of them are deprived of the basic opportunity and possibility to further educate themselves so that they have to work at low paying and demeaning jobs from which there is no way out.

While my experiences as an immigrant closely match those of the population I studied, those same experiences contributed to my own biases with regard to this population. However, my biases stemmed from a deep belief that conditions for undocumented youth are not what they should and could be. My hope in conducting research with an undocumented population was to

have their experiences and perceptions contribute and possibly ‘regenerate’ other forms of knowledge which have advanced the notion that this population ‘should not count.’

To counteract and explore my own subjectivities, I used reflexive memos that allowed me to examine my own feelings through reflective/reflexive exercises in which I became aware of my own internal biases and how these could affect any potential findings. My responsibility as a critical theorist began with an ethical responsibility to address unfairness and/or injustices within a particular population and/or setting. Within this research study, I define ethical responsibility as a compelling sense of commitment based on moral principles of human freedoms, respect and the right to live with dignity. Consequently, I could not detach my interest from a moral obligation to challenge gross misrepresentations of undocumented people as criminals and outlaws who are simply taking away what rightfully belongs to American-born citizens. I do feel drawn to making a contribution, even if it is only small, toward encouraging a more reflective and accurate understanding of this community by challenging traditional interpretations of undocumented immigrants “as criminals” and “mojados.”

## CHAPTER IV

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The quantitative analysis in this study provided the foundational work in order to determine the educational and occupational aspirations of a group of undocumented youth in relation to those of other youth from the same ethnic and linguistic background. The major differences between these two groups were their immigration status and the length of time that each had lived in the United States. As a result, this chapter focuses on presenting the educational and occupational aspirations of undocumented youth, as well as any differences found at the intersection of time-lived in the United States, immigration status, and gender.

This chapter is divided into three sections: First, the basic demographic features of the two groups that participated are presented. Second, the results of the data analysis are presented by focusing first on the educational and then on the occupational aspirations of both groups. Third, after showing the findings, the discussion section is introduced. The findings are integrated and correlated to those of previous studies. As a whole, this quantitative data analysis provided an opportunity to narrow down this study's inquiry with respect to the ways in which undocumented youth plan to achieve their life aspirations—a topic that is examined in Chapters V and VI by presenting undocumented youth's life portraits and qualitative analysis.

## Results

### Basic Demographic Features

Descriptive statistics were used first to describe the basic features of the data gathered. Table 4.1 shows in detail the demographic characteristics of the documented and undocumented participants. This information reveals that most of the youth were between 17 and 19 years of age. When this information was compared to the length of time each group had lived in the United States, a difference was noted. For instance, 57% of the undocumented participants have been in the country for over ten years, while 93% of the documented participants have been in the country for over 15 years, most having been born in the United States. However, within the undocumented youth sample, males and females did not differ in the amount of time they had been living in the United States,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 63) = 1.42, p = .701$ . Both males and females have been in the country an average of ten years.

Table 1 also includes the descriptive statistics for the participants' most recently completed grade. This information shows that most participants are currently between grades 11 and 12, which is consistent with the grade that they should be in at their respective ages. Additionally, when their present level of education is correlated to the time each group has lived in the United States, it is noted that most participants have acquired over 50% of their education in the United States.

Table 4.1 also shows undocumented and documented participants fathers' and mothers' levels of education, as well as their parents' present occupations. This information demonstrates that none of the fathers of the authorized and unauthorized youth have professional occupations that require some level of college education. Instead, most of the fathers' occupations in both groups are concentrated in factory-related jobs. However, the fathers of the undocumented youth

were twice as likely as those in the documented group to have employment as construction and restaurant workers. Conversely, mothers' employment patterns in both groups had a slightly different variation in that 81% of all the mothers did not work outside the home, thereby retaining highly traditional women's roles within the home. Nevertheless, of those mothers that work outside the home, 83% worked in factory-related jobs. In addition, within the documented participants, 4.8% of the mothers were professional workers, having jobs that require some level of college education. When the occupations of the parents were compared with their level of education across both groups, a correlation was found. For instance, of the 4.8% documented participants' mothers who have professional jobs, 4.8% also reported to have a college education. However, it can be noted that across both groups, authorized and unauthorized, most of these youths' parents have only had an elementary school education. Out of 125 total participants, 84 of the mothers and 75 of the fathers in both groups collectively, reported having an elementary school education. On the other hand, 32 mothers and 39 fathers reported having a secondary education.

Despite their fathers' present blue collar and mothers' mostly traditional occupations, as well as their lower levels of educational achievement, 71% of the undocumented and 84% of the documented participants want jobs that require some level of college education (Table 4.2). Question five in the Educational Values and Aspirations scale asked the youth whether their parents should have had more education; 83% of all participants agreed that their parents needed to have obtained more education, and additionally, that their parents wished for them to obtain more education than they had, 93% saying that their parents want them to continue their education beyond high school. Having determined that the youth felt strongly about the lack of educational achievement of their parents, a *t*-test was used to determine whether or not the

groups would differ enough in their educational aspirations. It was found that the answers among the two groups, the documented and undocumented, only differ slightly when asked whether they planned to continue their education beyond high school. Overall, the documented participants had a higher tendency to answer that they wanted to continue their education beyond high school, yet, the differences were not statistically significant,  $t = (123) -1.62, p = .109$ .

### **Educational Aspirations**

In order to further analyze the quantitative data, the following questions were explored:

1. How are the educational aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?
2. What are undocumented youth's educational aspirations?
3. What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the educational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth?

The Likert-scale items which were used in the survey consisted of four main scales:

Educational Values and Aspirations, Scholastic Experiences, Life in the States, and Life Plans.

The individual items on each scale were combined to form a single appropriate scale. Before analyzing the data, the following items in the survey were reverse scored. In Section II, items 20 and 21; in Section III, items, 29, 30, 31, 33, and 34; and in Section IV, 3 items were reversed, 35, 36 and 37. These questions were reversed so that all items were scored in one direction, higher scored answers reflecting greater agreement and more positive values as did all the other items in the questionnaire.

Running respective  $t$ -tests for each individual scale in the questionnaire showed that undocumented and documented participants did not differ in the following scales: Educational Values and Aspirations, Scholastic Experiences, and Life Plans. First, in the Educational Values

and Aspirations scale, the means for the undocumented and documented participants were: 29.10 and 29.24 respectively,  $t(123) = -.228, p = .820$ . Second, the respective means for the Scholastic Experiences scale were: 29.35 and 29.81,  $t(123) = -.524, p = .601$ . Third, in Life Plans, the undocumented and documented means were: 13.22 and 14.05,  $t(123) = -1.40, p = .165$ . However, in the scale for Life in the States, undocumented youth had a significantly higher score ( $M = 23.03$ ), than the documented ( $M = 20.58$ ),  $t(123) = -4.02, p = .000$ .

When the individual items within this scale were analyzed, only item 22 in the questionnaire, which asked participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement to whether being of Mexican descent made it more difficult to get an education, showed significant differences between both groups. Their respective means were: 3.29 and 2.02,  $t(123) = 4.59, p = .000$ . Unpredictably, this section of the survey, documented that participants had a higher agreement to the item than undocumented participants. This unanticipated result reveals that documented youth felt, to an extent, that being Mexican and/or of Mexican descent makes it harder to obtain an education, while undocumented participants did not share this opinion. This finding sheds some light on the different self-perceptions of each immigrant group that share the same ethnic, cultural and linguistic traditions.

When looking exclusively at the educational aspirations of both unauthorized and authorized youth, some similarities were found between both groups. For instance, 33 of the 62 documented participants said they would like to acquire Bachelor's, Master's and/or Doctoral degrees, 16, 8 and 9 respectively (See Table 4.3). The undocumented youth gave similar responses in that 42 of the 63 participants said they would like to acquire a Bachelor's, Master's and/or Doctoral degrees, 16, 18 and 8 respectively. Worthy of note is the difference between the authorized and unauthorized youth who said they would like to obtain a Master's degree.

Among these two groups there was a significant difference in the documented group, with 29% wanting to obtain a Master's degree or higher, compared with 42% of the undocumented group who want to obtain a Master's degree or higher. Therefore, the educational aspirations of both undocumented and documented youth are similar in that they both aspire to achieve high educational outcomes by pursuing a college degree and beyond. At the same time, these aspirations differ slightly because undocumented youth see themselves obtaining a Master's degree at higher levels than the documented group. On the whole, undocumented youth's college-going aspirations were relatively higher than those of the documented group, but they were not statistically significant. Undocumented youth want to obtain an education beyond high school, 92% saying that they want to obtain a two-year college degree and higher and 90% in the documented group. This is an interesting finding considering the many barriers unauthorized youth will face in trying to achieve any of these educational goals.

Finding no major differences in the educational aspirations of each group, the data set were analyzed considering the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on educational aspirations. This was completed using a three-way analysis of variance in order to determine any major differences between the two groups. The survey's Educational Values and Aspirations scale measured the dependent variable. The three-way analysis of variance found no significant main effects for immigration status, documented and undocumented, and for the time they have lived in the United States (Table 4.4). The main effect for gender, however, was significant. Females were found to have higher educational aspirations and to value education more than males; their respective means were: 29.8 and 28.5. Further analysis of the Educational Values and Aspirations scale showed that the mean for undocumented males and females was 28.2 and 30.1, respectively; while the mean for

documented males and females was 29.0 and 29.5 correspondingly. As can be seen, the effect that female youth have higher aspirations and value education more than males held, regardless of immigration status.

### **Occupational Aspirations**

Following the analysis of the educational aspirations of authorized and unauthorized youth, the following questions were then examined:

1. How are the occupational aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?
2. What are the occupational aspirations of these two groups?
3. What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the occupational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth?

The overall occupational aspirations of both groups were very similar to each other with minor variations. Only a small number of the undocumented youth, 18 out of 63, had thought about going into blue collar occupations, while 45 of them wished to go into white collar and/or professional jobs requiring a college education and even a Master's degree (Table 4.2). On the other hand, fewer documented youth wanted to go into blue collar occupations. Only 10 out of 62, selected manual labor jobs that require no college education and 52 selected jobs that require some college and/or a Master's degree (Table 4.2). In this regard, a difference approaching statistical significance between the occupational choices of documented and undocumented youth was noted, where documented participants chose to go into manual labor occupations at a lower frequency than undocumented youth  $\chi^2 (3, N = 125) = 7.16, p = .067$ . As table 4.6 shows, 19 undocumented youth thought they would ultimately follow blue-collar occupations. On the

other hand, of the documented youth, only 7 said they would realistically follow a blue-collar occupation.

Table 4.6 further dissects this information by showing the frequencies in the occupational aspirations of male and female documented and undocumented youth. It can be seen that almost at the same rate, documented and undocumented male youth wanted occupations that require some college, 24 out of 29, up to a Master's degree, 23 out of 33 respectively. In terms of the occupations selected by documented and undocumented females, it can be seen that they followed a similar pattern as the males. The females only significantly differed in the number that wanted to obtain jobs requiring a Master's degree in comparison to those who wanted to obtain jobs requiring a four year college degree, 12 out of 33 documented and 6 out of 30 undocumented females wanted to obtain a occupations requiring a college degree, twice the number. Overall, significant differences were not found among the job preferences for male and female youth for the jobs they will realistically follow,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 125) = 5.07, p = .167$ . Table 4.5 shows the breakdown for the occupations that the participants thought they will realistically follow by immigration status and gender. There was no difference between the occupations males and females thought about going into,  $\chi^2 (3, N=125) = .398, p = .941$ .

In order further investigate relationships between the occupational choices of both groups, a three-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine if immigration status, gender and time-spent in the United States made a difference in the occupational choices of either group. Question #4 in section V of the survey asked the youth questions about their occupational aspirations. Specifically, the participants were asked to provide two choices for the following question: What jobs or occupations have you *thought* about going into? In order to analyze these, the two selections were added to provide an overall scale for occupational choice.

The three-way analysis of variance found no significant differences among the occupational choices of the documented and undocumented youth, no differences between males and females, and no differences by time-lived in the U.S (Tables 4.7 and 4.8).

Further analysis was then conducted in order to see if there was a relationship between item #4 —What jobs or occupations have you *thought* about going into?, and #5 —Of these jobs, which one do you think you will *realistically* follow? In order to do this, a Kendall's Tau-b test was conducted for both, documented and undocumented youth. For the undocumented youth, a strong relationship was found between the questions: Which jobs have you *thought* about going into, and which jobs will you *realistically* follow. In general, the responses to questions 4 and 5 aligned in terms of undocumented youth's occupational desires and realistic expectations, with Kendall's tau-b = .598,  $p = .000$ . For the documented group, there was also a strong relationship between questions 4 and 5 above, with Kendall's tau-b = .674,  $p = .000$ .

To further understand the relationship between their educational and occupational aspirations, I wanted to see if there was a relationship between the participants' educational aspirations and the jobs they realistically wanted to follow. In other words, it was expected to see a positive correlation between the years they wanted to go to school and the occupations they had selected. In order to do this, questions #4 —(What jobs or occupations have you thought about going into?), #5 —(Of the jobs above which one do you think you will realistically follow?) and #7 —(If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you like to go in school?) in the survey's section V were analyzed. Using Spearman's rho, the correlation between items 4 and 7 was .385,  $p = .000$ , and between items 5 and 7 was .427,  $p = .000$ . Between items 4 and 7, the correlations for all the participants were medium-sized, which indicated that there were some discrepancies between the years the youth wanted to go to school

and the professions they had selected (Table 4.9). Some youths claimed that they realistically want to follow occupations that require more education than they thought they would get. For instance, 8 individuals claimed they follow an occupation requiring a Master's degree, but said they will get a Bachelor's degree or less education. On the other hand, 12 individuals said they will get Bachelor's or a Master's or degree, yet claimed that they would follow a blue collar occupation. Therefore, the educational aspirations of the youth did not exactly match in every respect the occupations and professions they had ultimately selected (Table 4.9). Furthermore, it seems that documented males were particularly prone to this. Of the 8 individuals who claimed that their occupation would require a Master's degree but said they would get a Bachelor's degree or less, 6 of them came from the documented male group (Table 4.10). Table 4.11 has the Spearman's rho correlations for questions 4 and 7 broken down by gender and immigration status. As can be seen, the Spearman's rho for documented males was small and not significant, while all the other correlations were borderline large and significant. These findings may show a lack of procedural knowledge about the occupations they think they can pursue and the educational qualifications and finances necessary to achieve these expectations. In the following section these results are analyzed and discussed.

## **Discussion**

This quantitative analysis did not find any major differences between documented and undocumented participants in their attitudes toward their educational and professional aspirations, as revealed by the desire of both groups to continue to pursue an education beyond high school by going to college and by obtaining jobs that require some level of college education. It is worth noting that while no statistically significant difference was found among the two groups; the undocumented youth plan to continue their education beyond high school,

despite the fact that they are more likely to encounter procedural, financial and legal barriers in continuing their education and obtaining a job after high school. For instance, the fact that undocumented participants desire to obtain Master's degrees at slightly higher rates than documented participants is a surprisingly valuable and intriguing finding taking into account that most studies on aspirations have focused exclusively on highlighting gender, ethnic, and cross-generational differences without analyzing any differences based on migratory status (Crosnoe, & Lopez-Gonzalez, 2005; Duran & Weffer, 1992; Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

Part of the positivist attitude that some undocumented youth displayed in terms of both their educational and occupational aspirations may be explained by a lack of conceptual knowledge about the profession they would like to follow and the totality of the future implications of their undocumented status. To exemplify, some discrepancies were found between the years the youth wanted to go to school and the professions they had selected (Table 4.9). It was uncovered that while undocumented youth chose to obtain a higher education, at the same time, some selected to go into jobs that required less education than they planned to acquire. This could be explained by the fact that some of the participants may simply not know enough about the job they want to pursue and have educational expectations that do not necessarily match the requirements for the job they ultimately want to work toward. As a result, undocumented youth seem to be setting their occupational expectations on the basis of past training, performance and work experiences (Portes et al., 1978), but their educational aspirations are not set consistently with the opportunities afforded by society within their undocumented status. In spite of this, the educational aspirations of most of the undocumented youth were to a greater extent correlated with the jobs they want to attain but not with what they might be able to accomplish given their irregular immigration status.

This fact is highlighted by the high number of undocumented youth who want to obtain a Master's degree and realistically think that they will be able to obtain employment within that area. It is important to note, that while a strong relationship was found between the responses to the questions "What jobs or occupations have you *thought* about going into?" and "Which jobs you will *realistically* follow?", undocumented youth selected to go into manual labor occupations at higher rates than documented youth. Given their limiting immigration status, and the restrictions this condition affords, it was not surprising that undocumented youth chose manual labor jobs. However, at the same time a high percentage of them, 19% also selected to go into jobs that require a Master's degree and beyond, such as medical doctor, lawyer and engineer (Table 4.5).

It is important to highlight that previous studies have also found discrepancies in the knowledge and the educational and professional goals of Mexican youth. These studies have concluded that some Mexican youth lack the procedural knowledge about what it takes to achieve their professional aspirations. In addition, they may not be aware of the relationship between educational credentials and a selected job (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Specifically, Matute-Bianchi's study examined the responses that different minority groups, Mexican and Japanese-descent youth, have on education. She found that while most Mexican-descent students asserted their need to obtain a higher education, adult success was often described in terms of having a nice car, a house, or a job "making more than \$10 an hour" (p.242). So, although these youth did not have difficulty in expressing their occupational aspirations, they struggled to articulate definite plans about how they were going to attend college and/or pursue additional studies or training. Overall, Mexican-descent youth were clearly goal-oriented but not goal-specific like their Japanese counterparts who had an intimate

knowledge of school curriculum, post- secondary opportunities and most importantly the correlation between their educational goals and the occupations they wanted to follow.

Matute-Bianchi's (1986) findings were later supported by Kao & Tienda's (1998) longitudinal study in which they found that while Mexican youth that graduated high school showed high aspirations, they had a great deal of erroneous information about college and severely lacked information about financial aid and admissions procedures. Such studies, while helpful in understanding some the complexities within the aspirations-achievement disjunction have still left unanswered questions about the ways in which undocumented Mexican youth intend to pursue their goals when their unauthorized immigration status is taken into account, an inquiry which is explored in Chapter V.

The finding that the aspirations of unauthorized and authorized youth were similar, contradicts other studies which have concluded that the educational aspirations and achievement of Mexican youth denotes a generational decline, especially during the second generation (Kao & Tienda, 1998, Cronoe, & Lopez-Gonzalez, 2005). In this study, 57% of the undocumented youth have been in the country for over 10 years, while 93% of the documented youth were born in the United States (Table 4.1). Yet, despite the fact that the documented youth clearly belong to the second generation of immigrants in their family, this did not affect their answers in terms of the educational and professional goals they aspire to achieve.

Similar to these findings, more recent studies using larger populations have equally concluded that Mexican descent youth "realistically expect to graduate from high school and a solid majority believe it within their reach to gain some college education" (St-Hilaire, 2003, p. 1037). This clearly reveals that most Mexican youth agree that education is the optimal means for socioeconomic advancement as well as is a key factor for getting ahead in the U.S. The

findings in this study showed that while documented participants have lived most of their lives in the United States, they aspire to continue their education beyond high school; therefore, time for the sake of time does not change the youths' perceptions and expectations (Table 4.3).

Looking deeper at some of the answers given in the survey revealed the ways that time spent in the United States might influence the aspirations of youth. In the findings, documented youth were more inclined to perceive their Mexican heritage as making it difficult for them to get an education. In the case of documented participants, their ethnicity is connected to a perceived subordinate status in society and is utilized as a "reflex-response," —a clear and instant explanation for the difficulties they perceive in achieving their aspirations (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Kenny et al., 2003; Watson & Skinner, 2004).

The fact that documented youth see their ethnic status as a barrier in achieving some of their future expectations, seems paradoxical at first, since it would be expected that undocumented immigrants would find their ethnicity as being more problematic in trying to achieve higher aspirations due to the fact that Mexicans account for 64% of all undocumented immigrants and being of Mexican heritage is closely associated with being undocumented in the U.S. (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2008; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Yet, an alternative explanation for this difference is that undocumented participants are more likely to blame their migratory status for their difficulties (See Chapter V), while documented participants attribute their struggles in getting ahead to the lower status associated with their ethnic background. These various answers reflect a connection between time spent in the United States and the participants' increasing awareness of societal expectations and barriers. Since undocumented immigrants, as a whole, have spent less time living in the United States, they may be unaware of subtle misconceptions and stereotypes against Mexican immigrants, while the documented youth

may have already experienced an array of different views about their Mexican heritage that can subsequently contribute to their perceptions (Donato, 1997; Gándara & Contreras, 2008).

Another important finding highlighted in the results section is the fact that despite the lower educational and occupational achievement levels of their parents, both groups, authorized and unauthorized, have high educational and occupational aspirations. Both immigrant groups seem to be consistently resilient in their determination to achieve more than their parents, both in terms of education and occupation. In this sense, undocumented youth understand their parents' level of educational achievement and the reality that they should have obtained more education. Therefore showing that despite their parents' low level of cultural and educational capital and having mostly blue-collar jobs, the youth are clearly encouraged to move beyond their parents' level of socioeconomic achievement and most have already progressed beyond the educational achievement of their parents' generation (Zhou et al, 2008). Consequently, an undocumented status alone does not necessarily set the stage for "differing aspirations and avenues for mobility," since other moderating factors such as parental aspirations and achievement, societal opportunities, as well as gender-role expectations must be taken into account (p.51).

Gender-role differences within the documented and undocumented groups were also examined in conjunction with time-spent in the U.S. and differences in immigration status. A number of previous studies have signaled significant differences in the educational expectations of males and females of Mexican descent (Cooper, 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Plunkett & Bacama-Gomez, 2003; Reyes et al., 1999). These differences have been explained in terms of boys' early socialization into "breadwinning roles" which compel many to enter the labor market at an early age (Hill et al., 2003; Zhou et al., 2008). In this study, it was noted that female youth had higher educational expectations and also value obtaining a higher education more than

males. These same differences remained consistent when the groups were divided by immigration status; both documented and undocumented females had higher educational aspirations.

This finding is consistent with other studies which have delineated a gender-gap between the aspirations and achievement of male and female Mexican youth (Cooper, 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Plunkett & Bacama-Gomez, 2003; Reyes et al., 1999). For instance, Reyes, Kobus, and Gillock (1999) and Gloria, Castellanos and Orozco (2005) found that the aspirations of Mexican females departed from traditional notions and roles of motherhood and many desired to be in non-traditional, male-oriented careers such as law, business, medicine, aviation, architecture and archeology. Likewise, this study found that Mexican female youth aspire at higher rate than males to obtain a secondary education and that they have high achievement plans for their futures. For instance, it was found that in general females want to obtain jobs that require them to obtain a college and/or a Master's degree at a higher rate than males (Table 4.5). However, it is important to highlight that while some gender differences were found, both the occupational and educational aspirations of both males and females mostly require some level of college education (Tables 4.5 and 4.6). As a result, it is important to keep in mind that the educational aspirations of both males and females are influenced not only by gender-role socialization, but also by cultural expectations and most importantly by the financial possibility to be supported and/or to support one's educational expectations (See Chapter V).

It is therefore essential to underscore that across both immigrant groups, despite any gender-role differences, all of the participants valued higher education and have real aspirations of obtaining advanced degrees. In terms of undocumented youth they all aspire to continue their education beyond high school and further wish to advance their socioeconomic status by

working in their selected careers. Of additional importance is the fact that the undocumented youth were optimistic in believing that having a higher education would eventually lead them to obtain the job they truly want. These findings challenge common beliefs about the educational aspirations and achievement of undocumented Mexican youth by highlighting that despite the many negative stereotypes and structural barriers they face, most of them want to be given the opportunity and tools to succeed.

Regardless of the turmoil that undocumented youth and families face due to their undocumented status, these youth still expect to achieve high educational and occupational outcomes and to carve out lives beyond their parents' socioeconomic level. This information gives a voice to the "unheard" and "otherwise clandestine" world of undocumented youth (Chavez, 1994, p.59). This quantitative analysis provided initial empirical data into the most times misunderstood world of undocumented youths as they try to build new inroads into different occupational markets and to develop the questions that are explored in-depth in the qualitative phase.

Table 4.1

*Demographic Characteristics of Documented and Undocumented Participants*

Characteristics	Undocumented		Documented	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Age				
17	19	30.2	22	35.5
18	17	26.9	23	37.1
19	14	22.2	6	9.7
20	8	12.9	6	9.7
21	5	7.9	5	8.1
Gender				
Male	33	52.4	29	46.8
Female	30	47.6	33	53.2
Time-lived in the U.S.				
0-5	11	17.5	-	-
Over 5	16	25.4	-	-
Over 10	22	34.9	-	-
Over 15	14	22.2	4	3.2
Born in the U.S.	-	-	58	93.5

Highest Grade Completed at Time of Survey

9 <sup>th</sup> grade	-	-	2	3.2
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	11	17.5	12	19.4
11 <sup>th</sup> grade	24	38.1	27	43.5
12 <sup>th</sup> grade	28	44.4	21	33.9

Fathers' Educational Level

Elementary	33	54.4	42	67.7
Secondary	22	34.9	17	27.4
College	2	3.2	2	3.2
I don't know	6	9.5	1	1.6

Mothers' Educational Level

Elementary	41	65.1	43	69.4
Secondary	16	25.4	16	25.8
College	1	1.6	3	4.8
I don't know	5	7.9	-	-

Fathers' Occupation

Restaurant Worker	17	27.0	7	11.3
Landscaping Worker	8	12.7	7	11.3
Construction Worker	16	25.4	11	17.7
Factory Worker	22	34.9	37	59.7

Mothers' Occupation

Restaurant Worker	7	11.1	-	-
Factory Worker	23	36.5	29	46.8
Child Care Worker	9	14.3	3	4.8
Professional Worker	-	-	3	4.8
Stay home	24	38.1	27	43.5

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Table 4.2

*Responses to Survey Question “What jobs or occupations have you thought about going into? ( #4),” Divided by Frequencies in Immigration Status and Gender*

Characteristic	Blue collar occupations – Requiring no college education		White collar occupations – Requiring some college education		Professional occupations– Requiring a college degree		Professional occupations– Requiring a Master’s degree and beyond		Total
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Undocumented	18	28.6	18	28.6	15	23.8	12	19.0	63
Documented	10	16.1	20	32.3	19	30.6	13	21.0	62
All Male	15	24.2	18	29.0	16	25.8	13	21.0	62
All Female	13	20.6	20	31.7	18	28.6	12	19.0	63
Total									125

Table 4.3

*Responses to Survey Question “How far would you like to go in school? (#37),” Divided by Frequencies in Immigration Status*

Characteristic	Some college		Graduate a 2-yr college with an Associate’s degree		Graduate a 4-yr college with a Bachelor’s degree		Get a Master’s degree		Get a doctoral, MD, PhD, law degree, etc.		Total
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Undocumented Males	4	12.1	8	24.2	7	21.2	10	30.3	4	12.1	33
Documented Males	7	24.1	8	27.6	10	34.5	1	3.4	3	10.3	29
Undocumented Females	1	3.3	8	26.7	9	30.3	8	26.7	4	13.3	30
Documented Females	0	0	14	42.4	6	18.2	7	21.2	6	18.2	33
Total											125

Table 4.4

*Three-Way Analysis of Variance Results Showing the Effects of Time-lived in the United States, Gender, and Immigration Status on Educational Aspirations*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Time-lived in the U.S.	3	27.8	9.25	.713	.546
Immigration Status	1	10.13	10.13	.781	.379
Male*Female	1	54.2	54.25	4.18	.043*
Time-lived*Male-Female	3	4.80	1.60	.123	.946
Legal Status*Male-Female	1	.878	.878	.068	.795

Table 4.5

*Responses to Survey Question “Of the Jobs You Selected Which Do You Think You Will Realistically Follow? (#5)”, Showing the Frequencies by Immigrations Status and Gender.*

Characteristic	Blue collar occupations – Requiring no college education		White collar occupations – Requiring some college education		Professional occupations– Requiring a college degree		Professional occupations– Requiring a Master’s degree and beyond		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Undocumented	19	30.2	18	28.6	14	22.2	12	19	63
Documented	7	11.3	26	41.9	16	25.8	13	21	62
All Males	16	25.8	22	35.5	10	16.1	14	22.6	62
All Females	10	15.9	22	34.9	20	31.7	11	17.5	63
Total									125

Table 4.6

*Responses to Survey Question “What Jobs or Occupations Have You Thought About Going Into? (#4)”, Showing the Frequencies by Gender and Immigration Status*

Characteristic	Blue collar occupations – Requiring no college education		White collar occupations – Requiring some college education		Professional occupations– Requiring a college degree		Professional occupations– Requiring a Master’s degree and beyond		Total
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Documented Males	5	17.2	11	37.9	7	24.1	6	20.7	29
Undocumented Males	10	30.3	7	21.2	9	27.3	7	21.2	33
Documented Females	5	15.2	9	27.3	12	36.4	7	21.2	33
Undocumented Females	8	26.7	11	36.7	6	20.0	5	16.7	30
Total									125

Table 4.7

*Three-Way Analysis of Variance Showing the Effects of Time-lived in the United States, Immigration Status and Gender on Occupational Aspirations*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Time-lived in the U.S.	3	3.55	1.19	.489	.690
Immigration Status	1	1.50	1.50	.620	.433
Male*Female	1	.207	.207	.085	.771
Time-lived*Male-Female	3	6.75	2.25	.930	.429
Legal Status*Male-Female	1	1.10	1.10	.453	.502

Table 4.8

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for ANOVA Table Above Divided by Immigration Status, Time-lived in the United States, and Gender*

*Immigration Status —Dependent Variable Occupational Choice*

Immigration Status	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Undocumented	4.950	.206
Documented	5.248	.465

*Time lived in the United States —Dependent Variable Occupational Choice*

Time lived in the U.S.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	5.083	.475
Over-5	5.167	.405
Over-10	4.592	.336
Over 15	5.063	.500
Born in the U.S.	5.329	.206

*Gender —Dependent Variable Occupational Choice*

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	5.018	.329
Female	5.081	.252

Table 4.9

*Crosstabulations Between Responses to Survey Questions “How Far Would You Like to Go in School?” and” Of the Jobs You Selected in Question 4 Which One Do You Think You Will Realistically Follow?”*

		Of the Jobs You Selected in Question 4 Which Do You Think You Will Realistically Follow?				
		Blue collar occupations – Requiring no college education	White collar occupations – Requiring some college education	Professional occupations– Requiring a college degree	Professional occupations– Requiring a Master’s degree and beyond	Total
How far would you like to go in school?	Some college	3	7	1	1	12
	Graduate a 2-year college with an Associate’s degree	11	17	7	3	38
	Graduate from a 4-year college with a Bachelor’s degree	7	14	7	4	32
	Get a Master’s degree	5	4	10	7	26
	Get a doctoral, MD, PhD, and/or law degree		2	5	10	17
	Total	26	44	30	25	125

Table 4.10

*Crosstabulations Between Responses to Survey Questions “How Far Would You Like to Go in School?” and “Of the Jobs You Selected in Question 4 Which One Do You Think You Will Realistically Follow?” For Documented Males Only*

		Of the Jobs You Selected in Question 4 Which Do You Think You Will Realistically Follow?				Total
		Blue collar occupations – Requiring no college education	White collar occupations – Requiring some college education	Professional occupations – Requiring a college degree	Professional occupations – Requiring a Master’s degree and beyond	
How far would you like to go in school?	Some college	1	4	1	1	7
	Graduate a 2-year college with an Associate’s degree	1	4	1	2	8
	Graduate from a 4-year college with a Bachelor’s degree	2	4	1	3	10
	Get a Master’s degree	0	0	1	0	1
	Get a doctoral, MD, PhD, and/or law degree	0	1	1	1	3
Total	4	13	5	7	29	

Table 4.11

*Spearman's rho Correlations for Questions 4 and 7 Broken Down by Gender and Immigration Status.*

	<i>Spearman's Rho</i>	<i>p</i>
Undocumented Males	.478	.005*
Documented Males	.183	.341
Documented Females	.543	.002*
Undocumented Females	.624	.000*

\* $p < .05$ .

## CHAPTER V

### YOUTH PORTRAITS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on presenting the living frames, i.e., the border crossing stories, educational and occupational aspirations and achievement plans of ten undocumented youth, five males and five females (See Table 5.1). These experiences are recounted in narrative format in order to provide the reader a detailed picture of these youths' immigrant journeys—a picture that gives the reader a clear sense of time, place and shaping life events in the lives of these youth. These qualitative interviews provided an opportunity to deeply analyze the quantitative findings as well as the multifaceted nature of these young adults' immigrant experiences taking into account their border crossing stories, their condition of illegality, their future plans and pathways to achievement.

The youth's living frames are presented in this first part and are mainly composed of the youth's own narratives in order to depict their counter-narratives and understandings of their undocumentedness within the context of socio-legislative and community forces that act to shape and guide their life aspirations and achievement plans. Following the life portrayals, the major domains that emerged during the qualitative analysis are explored. This analysis highlights the major domains related to the research questions during the qualitative analysis.

Table 5.1

*Male and Female Undocumented Participants' Pseudonyms, Ages, Length of Time in the U.S in Years, and Parental Level of Education*

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Age	Length of Time in the U.S. (yrs.)	Parents' Education Father and Mother
Jovani	19	6	Father: ES* Mother: ES
Karen	19	5	Father: ES Mother: ES
Ema	19	6	Father: College degree Mother: ES
Pedro	18	16	Father: ES Mother: ES
Daisy	20	10	Father: ES Mother: ES
Jonas	21	7	Father: ES Mother: ES
Dai	20	5	Father: ES Mother: ES
Gus	21	4	Father: ES Mother: ES
Josie	19	5	Father: ES Mother: ES
Lulu	21	8	Father: ES Mother: ES

ES= Elementary School

### **Jovani**

*I've always wanted to be a medical doctor from the time I was little. But that would be really difficult now because they do give opportunities to go to college here, but they're not enough for someone like me.[...] You first start college, then after you're there you run out of money. You then have to work and go to school, work and go to school because you can't really be depending on your parents at that point. That is going to be too much pressure to do it on your own, and then you start to feel desperate. Then at the end, really my only option is to go to a vocational school, to have a short career.*

Jovani describes himself as a “magnet for making friends.” He sees all undocumented immigrants as “human beings” who are only treated differently because they don’t speak English well, as he says “having a paper doesn’t make you better than anybody else.” Born in San

Gabriel in Puebla Mexico 19 years ago, he remembers his Mexican friends and the streets of San Gabriel fondly by saying: “I had a lot of fun when I lived there.” Jovani’s journey to the United States across a 2-mile U.S.-Mexico desert border has shaped the way he feels and understands his condition of illegality. Jovani’s border crossing story began in late 2004 when he was ten years old and was told by his parents, “We are going to the U.S., in search of a better life.” The actual crossing took Jovani and his family over two months to finally reach their hot and humid destination in Mesa, Arizona.

The border crossing at Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona is one of the deadliest places to cross. Deaths of undocumented Mexican immigrants in this region during 2005, the year Jovani and his family crossed, were 246, and about 80% of those found dead were under 40 years old (Arizona Daily Star, 2011). Nevertheless, it is precisely due to the dangerous and isolated nature of this area that desperate unauthorized immigrants take the risk of crossing, even knowing that they will be at the mercy of temperatures of over 110 degrees, extreme desert-like conditions and unscrupulous human smugglers. But even with the very real prospect of a torturous death, Jovani’s father decided that this was still the best place for the family to cross.

Notwithstanding the physical dangers, Jovani’s father struggled for over two months with a human smuggler, a “coyote”<sup>2</sup> who continuously lied about helping the family cross to the United States together. After telling Jovani's father that the entire family would be crossing together, the coyote then told Jovani’s father that he needed to cross the border on foot with his son and a group of ten other people, and that his wife, two small children, and teenage daughter, had to cross separately with another group. This was a crucial decision which Jovani’s father made with many hesitations, but as Jovani put it, “confiando en Dios,” “trusting God.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Coyotes” are the name for smugglers who facilitate the migration of people across the U.S.-Mexican border. Whenever human smuggling is referred to, the Spanish word coyote will be used.

After waiting for over three weeks in a Sonora hotel, the trip across the border began for Jovani and his father on a Sunday afternoon, when the coyote suddenly decided to send them on foot across the border in a group of 14 people including two border crossing guides:

So my family was separated, my mom, my sister, my little brothers, they had to stay back and we went in the front with the group that was walking. Once we got to the actual border, we had to cross a chain-linked fence, but all you have to do is lift it up and go across. I remember when we got to the fence, my father told me, just remember this because this is where you are going to take a step from Mexico into the United States. It was memorable; I won't forget about that.

Yet, getting to the fence was only the beginning. Jovani continues:

The coyote said that it would take us three days and three nights to get to the nearest town in the United States, so each of us were carrying two gallons of water. He told us to wear black clothes and to take some canned food, water but nothing else. He also told us to be careful with thorns and to watch out for snakes.

While Jovani narrates the many struggles he faced trying to get across the border, his general recollection of this experience was very positive, as he described it in contrast to that of his uncle, Miguel. While crossing the same border, Miguel was once kidnapped by *Los Zetas*, a Mexican criminal organization dedicated to illegal drug trade, assassinations, and other organized crime activities across the border (Greyson, 2010). During another trip, Miguel was apprehended by the border patrol and deported three times back to Nogales. In total, he attempted to cross the border eight times before reaching his final destination.

Jovani describes his first impression of the U.S. as very optimistic —thinking as he looked at the houses and the cars people drove: “Life is really very good here.” But Jovani’s fondest memories are for his elementary and middle schools in Mesa, Arizona. He remembers not feeling like a stranger because: “Everyone in that school looked like me and everyone seemed nice, I did not see any discrimination, everyone helped me.”

But Jovani's life changed drastically yet again when Sheriff Joe Arpaio started an anti-immigrant political campaign in Maricopa, Arizona, which made negative sentiments toward immigrants quickly spread throughout the Grand Canyon state. In 2006, Arpaio instructed his deputies to arrest all of those suspected of being undocumented aliens. Telling *The Washington Times*: "I'm not going to turn these people over to federal authorities so they can have a free ride back to Mexico. I'll give them a free ride to my jail (2006)." Jovani remembers that "at that time there were a lot of immigration raids and my father was very afraid." This was the beginning of the second migration in Jovani's life. This time, Jovani's father relocated the family, not in search of a better life, but in search of safety and peace of mind.

Jovani's father relocated the family in 2008 to New Jersey, where Miguel, Jovani's uncle had been living for over five years. Settling into this new routine was not particularly easy for him as he recalls: "I started hanging out and cutting classes." Jovani found a stark contrast between his life in Arizona and his new life in New Jersey. The move from Arizona to New Jersey caused Jovani's grades to suffer and his overall interest in school severely diminished. Jovani attributes this change to the negative influences around him in "Small Town," New Jersey. Jovani unequivocally sees his educational experiences in Arizona as more helpful because he was able to learn a lot of English and be supported by people who cared about his well-being.

In New Jersey's schools he began to feel isolated, no longer did he feel that he was part of the group, no longer did he feel that he belonged and was accepted. He narrates:

One day I came into a classroom, and I sat down and this Dominican kid saw me, he started yelling and cursing me out. He started calling me stupid Mexican, "pinche gey,"<sup>3</sup> and you know, you get offended and those are the things that start gang violence around here.

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<sup>3</sup> Mexican slang; used as a demeaning insult.

But Jovani's negative experiences in the New Jersey public school system were not relegated to the way he was greeted by other Latino groups, but also to the way his academic pursuits suffered:

When I got here (to the high school in New Jersey), I thought that the school was ugly. When I got here, I wasn't interested in going to school anymore; I just wanted to hang out all the time.

Nevertheless, Jovani's various experiences in New Jersey have helped him to put his aspirations and plans for the future into a more realistic perspective:

I've always wanted to be a medical doctor from the time I was little. But that would be really difficult now because they do give opportunities to go to college here, but they're not enough for someone like me. I mean, you go to college, and then you don't finish, is always left halfway, in the middle. You first start college, then after you're there you run out of money. You then have to work and go to school, work and go to school because you can't really be depending on your parents at that point. That is going to be too much pressure to do it on your own, and then you start to feel desperate. Then at the end, really my only option is to go to a vocational school, to have a short career, and that is it, just get out.

Jovani understands not only the limitations of his immigration status, but also of his financial situation. He feels that it would be a risk to enroll in a two- to four-year college track because he may not finish due to his limited financial situation. Jovani clearly articulated that he feels a sense of duty not only to help his parents and to guide his sister and little brothers as the eldest, but to the fact that he migrated to the United State and that alone entails a great sense of responsibility.

I know that I got to work and go to school at the same time because I feel that I need to help my parents. I just can't stay home and do nothing like a *pretty boy*. I started realizing when I was hanging out with my friends and not going to school that that's not why I came here. I started getting afraid because I might get caught doing the wrong thing. My mom started telling me all of the consequences of the things that I was doing, like the police could catch me and get me deported. So then I started asking myself: Why did I come here? To waste my life?

Thus Jovani has weighted his chances of finishing a college education against his sense of duty and practicality, and in the end, he has chosen not to go to college but instead to go to a vocational school and/or to an apprenticeship. Jovani also displayed an understanding of the vocation he would like to pursue.

Right now I'm working in a factory, and I've already learned to use one of the machines that bends metal there. Very few people know how to use it because you have to be trained by a specialist. So with the knowledge I already have, I can go to another factory, and I can get paid like \$20.00 an hour.

Through his work experiences Jovani has gained an intimate knowledge of metallurgic and understands due to his own network of work contacts, the job market and future expectations for those who display an expertise in this area. As a result, Jovani feels that he is well-positioned to go to a six-month school and get a certificate. Once he has the certificate, he believes, this will make it better for him to find a job. Jovani's future plans include sharpening his work skills through an apprenticeship at a vocational school and obtaining a higher-paying job that would in turn allow him to be independent and help his family.

Following his determination to go to a vocational school and get a certificate that would allow him to earn more money in a different factory, Jovani was not able to delineate a clear path to how he plans to accomplish these plans. His explanations did not include any of the steps he may need to take to apply to a vocational school.

I don't know what school I am going to; I don't have that yet. Where I work there is a Black guy that goes to a school that's nearby. I'm planning on asking him about it, but lately he hasn't been to work, so when he gets back, I will ask him. I had already gone to another school for mechanics, and they wanted like \$8,000; they just want to make sure that you have a high school diploma. So I am thinking that the school I want to go to will cost me about that.

Jovani's educational plans are based on the oral accounts of his uncle, Miguel and of his network of work friends. These work relationships have allowed him to feel comfortable in the

knowledge that he has the necessary skills to get a better paying job and that his undocumented status is not a barrier in achieving the occupational and educational goals that he has set for himself. Jovani feels confident that once he obtains the certificate he will be able to get a job because his various experiences in the work place have reinforced in him that he can be successful in the labor market.

Therefore, Jovani's achievement barriers did not include his immigration status; instead Jovani's greatest barriers in achieving his educational and work goals are summarized by his lack of English skills and by his ability to continue to stay out of trouble. Even though Jovani notes his financial and career limitations as a result of his immigration status, he does not view them as the most prevalent barriers. Jovani does not see his unauthorized status as a barrier to achieve the aforementioned goals, as he describes undocumented persons as: "Regular, normal people like everybody else, we simply come here to work." Furthermore he says: "We are all human beings, regardless of whether you have papers or not, the only thing that makes us different is that we don't speak English. Sometimes I do feel like I'm less than other people, but is just because I don't speak English." Presently Jovani understands some of the limitations of his immigration status and hopes to be able to go to a vocational school to be able to make a decent living in order to continue helping his family.

### **Karen**

*My immigration status is not a barrier to do anything. The only barrier I have is that I know that college is expensive, so financially it would be difficult.[...] So, what I would like to do is graduate high school and work for about a year and save some money.*

Karen is a self-proclaimed shy girl, "*muy callada, pero muy amiguera a la misma vez,*" very quiet but very friendly at the same time. She doesn't feel different from other immigrants because of the fact that she does not have papers, "that doesn't mean anything." Karen came to

the United States in 2006 when she was thirteen years old. Karen was born in Izúcar de Matamoros, a small rural town in the Mexican state of Puebla. Izúcar de Matamoros is located in the southwestern part of Puebla. In the census of 2010, it had a population of over 72,000 inhabitants and an average completion rate of 7.7 grades among those older than fifteen years of age (INGE, 2011).

Karen recalls her life in Izúcar de Matamoros as being “good,” she says: “Everyone liked me there; I had a lots of friends.” Living in Izúcar de Matamoros, Karen remembers:

I was living in my grandparents’ house [her father’s parents]. My father and my real mother had separated when I was three years old. My mother came to the United States first, but I had never had contact with her until after I was living in New Jersey. Later my father came, but he came alone. My father already had another family, and my mother also had another family.

Karen’s border crossing journey was painfully forced upon her on Christmas Eve, 2005, as she recalls: “I did not even know I was coming until the day before. All along, I thought they were bringing my brother, not me. So I did not even have time to say goodbye to anyone.”

Karen’s painful departure from her native surroundings was particularly difficult as she describes leaving those who had taken care of her when her mother and later her father left her to come to the States. Those relatives made her feel like she had a home and belonged, but the migration news that was thrust upon her made her feel alone as she would travel with her “father’s other family.”

Karen’s crossing began with her stepmother on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005. Karen’s father was already living in New Jersey, and while he had had been crossing the border back and forth for many years, he had decided that it was time for him to permanently settle and reunite with his wife and daughter in the States. So, with the help of Karen’s father, her stepmother made the necessary arrangements for a coyote to transport them across the border from Nogales, Sonora to

Nogales, Arizona. However, crossing to the United States was not a straightforward process. In their case, they had to stay in Hermosillo, the capital city of the state of Sonora, for three weeks. Karen explained: “We had to wait for the coyote because it was Christmas time, and he was busy partying and being with his family, so we just had to wait for him to be ready.” After days of waiting, Karen finally began her arduous journey, which was similar to that of a game of cat and mouse—one that can many times end in unfortunate disappointments for the paying immigrant:

Once day they [the coyotes] finally picked us up from the hotel and put us in a small house near the border. There we waited for more people to come, and then they helped us cross the border through a fence. This fence had an opening, a hole they had made just to help us cross. So we left the small house and they made us walk about an hour before we could get to the fence. But the crossing was not easy because once we made it through the fence, we got caught on the other side by the border patrol. The good thing was that they did not detain us; they just saw us and told us to turn around. So we did.

Getting “caught” by the border patrol was “scary” but Karen describes the border patrol officers as “good people, doing their jobs.” Karen distinctively draws a difference between getting *detained* and getting *caught*. She is grateful that she was not officially detained and sent to a deportation center because “then they got your name on record and they can keep you in there like in a prison for a while. They don’t send you back immediately.” Karen continues:

The following day we tried going over a different fence when we saw the border patrol lights on the other side again, and so the coyotes decided to go back. The next day they decided to help us cross the border very early in the morning like around six. So that was like around January 22<sup>nd</sup>. So we had to spend a whole month on the road. The day we crossed, the two coyotes had made another opening for us to cross. So this time, we went through the fence, and we ran to a nearby house on the United States’ side. Once we got to this house, we had to stay there for two days waiting for more people to arrive and then after that they put us in a minivan. They made us lay on the floor and transported us to another house that was even farther away from the border.

After this trial-and-error process, Karen and her stepmother finally made it to their final destination in New Jersey. In their case, crossing the border was not only physically challenging but also an emotionally charged experience for Karen because once she arrived at her father’s

house and her new life in the States began “she felt very uncomfortable” and unexpectedly disappointed.

During the time I lived with my father, I did not go to school. I got here on , and I did not go to school until September of the same year. I did not get along with my father. I would do everything; they would have me wash their clothes, the dishes, clean floors, cook, take care of the kids, and she [step-mother] didn't do anything. So I started telling them: “The reason you brought me here was for me to clean your floors, do your dishes and wash your clothes, you brought me here as a maid and nothing more.”

Karen's life changed dramatically from her life in Izúcar de Matamoros when she arrived to New Jersey. Karen never expected to be uprooted to the United States not to continue her education. She felt she had been lied to and her relationship with her father and his family became increasingly contentious. She eventually felt that she had to get away from her father in order to continue her studies and “not to be treated like a maid.” This forced her to reach out to her birth mother and ask for help.

I never had a relationship with my mother. My brother, the eldest, was already here, and he had contact with her. At first, I hated her, and I didn't want to talk to her, but she kept insisting and I was able to forgive her and talk to her. When I got to live with my mother things were better because she did not treat me like a maid. In her house, I did not have to do all the things that I had to do in my father's house. At that time, my mom also put me in school, which is what I wanted to do.

Karen's dilemma with “being treated like a maid” reflects her desire to be given the education she felt she deserved and the freedom to “do the things people my age do.” She did not feel ready to embrace the adult responsibility of maintaining a household, and she deeply resents her father for forcing her into this situation. Ironically, once Karen entered school she recalls:

I felt strange because people would look at me differently. Like a lot of the people in the class were not Mexican, so they looked at me differently because of what I wore but mostly because I didn't speak English. So at first it was really hard for me because I could not understand any English. When I first got to high school I became very sad and disillusion about everything, my life was not going well. So then I decided to drop out. But being at home doing nothing was not good for me. I hated it. I would stay at home all day and I not talk to anyone; I was very isolated. So, I decided to get back in school; once I got back, I was more motivated than before.

Throughout the interviews, Karen asserted the importance of education in her life. She talks about the education she has been exposed to in the United States as very good for her. Karen's expectations before she entered school were very high, as she had hoped to learn "English quickly" and "just learn a lot." However, she was unprepared to deal with the cultural differences and the academic difficulties that she encountered. In addition, the drastic changes she had experienced in the span of a year had left an indelible mark on her. Being forced to cross the border, leaving friends and family members, to be later coerced to side with her mother against her father, exhausted her and left her vulnerable to feeling sad and depressed once she finally entered school. As a result, after being in school for less than one year Karen decided to drop out.

Quitting school, just like being out of school for six months while living with her father, only put a temporary damper on Karen's educational aspirations. Dropping out of school made her realize how isolated she truly was from people her age. This made her go back to school and be motivated to realize her dream of being a doctor. Karen aspires to be "a doctor that takes care of kids" although she does not know the name of this specialty. Karen's plans to achieve this dream are not explicitly defined, and she does not know what colleges she might attend and/or the educational requirements she might need to achieve her dream. At this point, she plans to get this information "soon," but she does not know how, from whom and/or where.

While Karen's educational and occupational aspirations are high, she demonstrated great difficulty in detailing any concrete plans to achieve them and only sees her lower socio-economic level as the main barrier in achieving her goals. Karen is adamant that her immigration status is not an impediment in achieving any of her future aspirations.

My immigration status is not a barrier to do anything. The only barrier I have is that I know that college is expensive, so financially it would be difficult. But my mom said that she will support me with whatever I want to do. So, what I would like to do is graduate high school and work for about a year and save some money. I know that when I go to college I am going to need books and those books are expensive, and I want to be able to at least buy my own books and have some spending money.

Karen's occupational aspirations are vague. While she hopes to continue her education and pursue her dream to become a pediatrician, her immediate occupational aspirations are plagued by great uncertainty, but at the same time, she wholeheartedly believes that she will reach her life-long dream to be a medical doctor. Since this is her main future goal, her occupational aspirations are limited to working for about a year to save some money for when she goes to college. Karen expects to depend on her mother until she finishes college. She does not feel the need to work and/or to support herself in the near future. She is confident that with her mother's financial support she will be able to achieve all of her dreams.

### **Ema**

*I used to want to go to college, but I know that's not going to be possible because I don't have papers and what would I do with a college degree if I don't have papers?*

Ema describes herself as a serious and quiet person, who likes to keep to herself but also likes to get ahead in life and is assertive enough not to "be pushed around." Ema's border crossing began when she was 12-years-old in 2005. Her border crossing was precipitated by her mother's desire to be reunited with her husband, Ema's stepfather, and by her mother's dream "to see the States." Ema says that in Mexico she had a very comfortable and stable life and that her mother had no real need to cross the border. Thus, Ema's crossing was not precipitated by her family's impending financial strains.

When Ema was told by her mother that she was making the trip, she immediately refused because she had just started secondary school in a private Catholic school and had many new

friends. In addition, Ema's father had not been informed that she was leaving Mexico because her mother was afraid that he might refuse to give his permission and prevent her from taking Ema to the United States. But Ema's mom eventually convinced her that "we were only going to the States for a while. She said that we would live in the U.S. for a little bit while her husband worked, but then go back to Mexico."

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Ema, her mother and her 2-year-old sister boarded a bus from Puebla to Mexico City and then a flight from Mexico City to Ciudad Juárez in the state of Coahuila, where they ultimately crossed the border into the United States. Ema describes her border crossing experience as "an adventure, like I just cross the border, live there a while, and get back to my life." She recalls that when they got to Juárez: "The coyotes told us to leave everything we had brought, just keep the clothes on our backs." Ema's border crossing was relatively uneventful as she describes the following:

They [the coyotes] picked us from the hotel, put us in a van and took us real close to the border and put us in the back of a store. There more people started coming, people that also wanted to cross the border. Once everyone was there, it was like 20 people, they took us out of the store and told us to just start running. We started running along a deserted stretch. We ran for like a half an hour. After we had passed that stretch, we had to cross a small sewer canal and after that cross a fence. After we did all that we saw that there was a camera from the border patrol, so we hid behind a cactus bush. We were all lying down on the ground. When the camera turned, we crossed the highway, cars were passing by real fast, but they let us cross. Once we got to the other side of the highway we laid down on the ground again because we didn't want the camera to catch us. We lay there for like two hours waiting for the other coyotes to pick us up in a truck.

Border crossing experiences vary depending on the crossing point but mostly on the level of experience and human network of the smugglers involved in the process. However, while Ema's actual crossing only took about two hours, her trip to New York City was not as uneventful.

After having arrived in El Paso, Texas, the objective was to continue the trip to reunite with Ema's stepfather in the Bronx in New York City. The coyotes had already been paid to

transport them there, and as a result, after three days of waiting in an El Paso hotel, Ema, her mother and little sister were put in a truck with 18 other people heading north. Ema recounts:

That was like a 10-hour trip. We were like sardines inside this truck. The first time they attempted the trip, the coyotes got lost because they were drinking and using drugs. So we were on the road for five hours, and they didn't make any headway. So they decided to go back to El Paso. After that people were getting very angry. The following day they put us on the truck again, but this time they had a different driver. This time we got to North Carolina. This was a very difficult trip because it was very hot. A lot of people were getting sick.

Ema's last leg of the trip was plagued by the abuse of human smugglers who cared very little for the comfort and safety of those they had been entrusted with. These coyotes did not care about the wellbeing of those who were getting sick and about responsibly transporting these immigrants in a timely manner to their destinations.

Having arrived in New York City, Ema had hoped that her adventure would be over, and that having left her friends behind would have been worth it. To her shock, what she saw was not what she had imagined. Ema had imagined a city filled with clean streets, beautiful people and a nice beautiful house to live in, "if not better, at least not worse." However, what she encountered was:

A little apartment, with a little hallway, and a little kitchen. It had a small living room and one bedroom, and it was just one closet for eight people. So I really started comparing everything I had in Mexico with what I was seeing in the States, and it was not good. To sleep we had two beds in the bedroom, so my mom, her husband and my little sister slept in one. I slept in the same room but in a different bed. The other people slept in the living room.

While many immigrants, documented and undocumented, come to the United States with inflated dreams and second-hand reports of what life in the States is really like, most adults make the trip on their own accord and understand that things might be different. However, at 12-years-old, Ema could not have expected the realities of what she might encounter and/or how to face any potential difficulties. Instead, she kept comparing what she had left behind with what she

encountered in the States. Ema recalls that in Puebla she had her own bedroom, bathroom and a big house with a big backyard. But living in the Bronx, she not only had to share a bedroom with her mother, stepfather and little sister, but an entire apartment with four other people who had also just recently arrived from Mexico. Continuously thinking that she had left something better was painfully draining, as she slowly began to realize that she was not going back.

Ema's school experiences were equally shocking. As she prepared to enter school, her inability to communicate with school peers became a source of great anxiety for her.

I did not want to go to school. The school was nearby the apartment, so we would pass by it, but I did not want to go because it looked like a prison. I also didn't want to go to school because I didn't know how I was going to communicate with people. I knew a little bit of English but mostly in writing; I just didn't know how I was going to talk to people.

Based on the school's exterior, Ema had expected her life in school to be negative, and once she enrolled, her fears were confirmed. "The class was out of control. Some days we did not even have a teacher, we just sat there alone." Once in school, she realized that "most of them [her school peers] were Dominicans, one Puerto Rican and three Mexicans, but they had already been here a while so they were different because some of them spoke English and acted like the others." In school, Ema felt isolated not only because of her lack of English skills, but also because she was an ethnic minority who acted differently than the rest.

In time, Ema was able to settle down and make new friends in school. However, she says that her academic performance in the States: "has never been as good as it was in Mexico, but I get by." At the same time, Ema's educational aspirations have been severely affected by her move to the United States and her status as an undocumented immigrant. She states:

I used to want to go to college, but I know that's not going to be possible because I don't have papers and what would I do with a college degree if I don't have papers? I used to want to go to Mexico and just go to college there, but now that's not possible either so I

have to be a little more realistic, so I am just going to an interior design school for like a year.

Ema's previous goal to go to a four-year college has been moderated by her undocumented status. She understands that being an unauthorized immigrant prevents her from having access to many of the opportunities available to others. Ema says that "being illegal means that you're going to have barriers in your life. Like if I want to apply for a scholarship, I can't because I don't have a Social Security number." Ema's educational and occupational aspirations are now to "work for a year, save money and then the following year go to school to get my certificate and then be able to get a job and work on that."

Ema has been forced to give up many of her long-time dreams and finds herself trapped in a place that she doesn't belong. She says: "I feel like if I die they can't even bury me here. If I were in Mexico, I could say this is my land, this is where I was born, I could die here, but being illegal, they can't even bury me here." Ema's feelings are exacerbated by her dream of going back to Mexico. Yet, she feels that it would be unsafe for her to go back:

My father has a very high government job in Puebla. He got his job under the PRI government. Every six years there is a new governor; the new governor is from the other party, the PAN. Since my father was hired under the PRI, he's been having a lot of problems with the new government because they want to fire him. He feels that his life is in danger. So, he doesn't want me to go back.

Ema feels that her life in the States is that of a passerby, a stranger. While she understands that her life has changed and that going back to Mexico is not an option within her reach, she fully identifies with being Mexican and her main goal is simply to survive in the States.

Like when I hear the Pledge, I don't feel anything; you stand and you listen to it but you feel nothing for it, but when I hear the Mexican national anthem, I feel proud and my heart fills up.

In order to have a better salary, Ema feels that she needs to obtain an education beyond her high school degree. As a result, her long-term occupational goals are tied into her desire to attend an interior design school in NYC, a school she says: “Is really good because they also help you find a job when you finish.” Ema says that she would work on anything for a year to save some money and then go to the interior design school. However, while Ema’s college-going aspirations are now dim because she understands that even if she finishes college she would still need legal status to get a job, she doesn’t see the same issue arising after she obtains her certificate from the interior design school —she says that she sees herself working as an interior designer in a couple of years. At this point, Ema does not have any clear information about how she intends to apply to the vocational school of her choice and the exact financial resources she would need to make her dream a reality. For now, Ema is focusing on getting a job and saving money for about a year so that she does not have to rely on her mother when she is ready to enroll in the interior design school.

## **Pedro**

*From the time I was little I always thought about going there [Rutgers University]. Like I know that to go to college you need financial aid because is very expensive. But in my condition, I don’t think I would be eligible for financial aid. I don’t know if money is going to be an issue.*

Pedro describes himself as an open-minded person who has very broad perspectives on life. To exemplify this, he says of girls: “When it comes to girls, I see them as people, I see them as human beings. I don’t see them as sexual things.” Pedro also says that he hates people who “take things too seriously,” and at the same time hates to be manipulated: “I have a problem with authority.” Pedro was a two-year-old infant when his parents took him across the border, as a result, he has no recollection of these events and his border-crossing journey is a collection of the stories he has heard from his parents throughout the years. Pedro was born in San Andrés

Cholula. Cholula is a city located in the center west of the state of Puebla in central Mexico. San Andrés Cholula has a population of 100,500 inhabitants with an average completion rate of 10.9 grades among those 15 years and older (INGE, 2011).

Due to his young age, Pedro's border crossing story is tied into his parents' decision to come back to the United States. Pedro's parents met in New Jersey when they were both 18-years-old. Pedro's mother had originally come to the United States in 1989 to support her own mother who had been left a widow and who was sick. So, at the tender age of 18, she decided to migrate to the States where one of her uncles and a brother were already stationed.

Pedro's father's migration was also driven by economic factors. Pedro's father crossed the border illegally in 1987, accompanied by his father, brother, and uncle. From 1991 to 1993 Pedro's parents lived in New Jersey. However, after being together for a while they decided that they did not want to raise a family in the United States and went back to their native Mexico. But once the newlyweds settled in the Mexican town of Cholula, things took an unexpected turn. After having lived in the United States, Pedro's parents began to see that Mexico was not the best place to raise their children. About this subject, Pedro's mother has said to him: "We left Mexico because people were telling me: Your son is going to be a worker in the fields just like the other kids." But she would say to them: "No! My son is going back to the United States, he is going to get educated and be somebody." So, in 1994, the decision was made to cross the border a second time, this time with two-year-old Pedro.

My parents crossed the border by car. They have told me that we were all seated in the back with the coyote, and that there were three people in the front seat. They also tell me that when they got to the border crossing gate, they got stopped by that a border patrol officer, but that he just looked at them, didn't say anything and let them pass. After they crossed the border, they were taken to a hotel away from the border, and then to another hotel even farther away from the border. After that, one of the coyotes who was also coming to New York brought them here by bus.

Even though Pedro has no clear recollection of living in Mexico, he is very attached to his Mexican heritage and imagines visiting Mexico real soon. While Pedro would like to visit Mexico, he admits: “I don’t have many relatives there. All of my family is here, they have all come illegally.” Pedro describes his family as: “People who are used to crossing the border when they want.” Pedro’s family has a history of circulatory migration dating back to the early 80s, and at this point, Pedro only has one blood relative remaining in Mexico —his father’s sister, who recently retired. Given the fact that Pedro has so little ties in Mexico, he does not see a future for himself there. He also says that his parents are not going back because “they are now texting,” referring to the fact that his parents have already adapted to American lifestyles and are modernized in many of their ways.

In speaking of his Mexican heritage, Pedro says that while he is categorized as Mexican, he really isn’t because he “belongs here.” Pedro struggles with this dichotomy and focuses the conversation on the lack of respect he receives for being Mexican, he relates:

There was this time I was with my mom, my dad, my brother and sister, and we were walking around the mall. There was this young, white, preppy guy walking opposite us. Since I was with my family, we were all talking Spanish. When the guy passed me, I heard him say: I hate freaking Mexicans. When I heard that I turned around and I asked him: What you just say? If you are going to disrespect me, disrespect me to my face. And he said like: Oh, no, I didn’t say nothing. I experience similar things like that when I go to a store and people look at me and think I am going to steal something. There is a lot of hate toward Mexicans because we are different.

Pedro’s Mexican heritage is closely tied to his ability to speak Spanish. Pedro says that he doesn’t enjoy speaking Spanish because he does not like to be stereotyped. Pedro continues to describe how he gets respect when he speaks English instead of Spanish:

I don’t like to speak Spanish because I don’t want people to think of me as like a Mexican that can’t speak English. Like when I talk to people in Spanish, and I tell them I was born in Mexico, they treat me differently, but when I answer them back in English I get respect. They back off. They see me differently.

Pedro has had several discriminatory experiences with the way outsiders perceive his ethnicity through his ability to speak English and Spanish. Pedro's safety net has been the English language, which he has used as a tool to face off what he describes as attacks and disrespect. Pedro speaks proudly of the fact that he has never been in a bilingual program: "Even when I entered Kindergarten, I wasn't in a bilingual program; my parents always wanted me to learn English."

Pedro talks about his education in the States as being very good. He says that he has been able to perform well in school because his parents care and because it is his mother's dream, "the reason she brought me here." He describes himself as a very focused student, who likes to get good grades. Pedro's educational aspirations are to go to a four-year college. He details that he would like to go to Rutgers or William Paterson University. Pedro says that most likely he will end up in William Paterson University because: "To go to Rutgers you have to have really good grades and mine are not that good right now." Pedro hopes that a college education focusing on business administration will give him the tools to one day reach the occupational goal of having his own business.

I want to have my own business because I don't want people telling me what to do. I can't have that. I've never worked, but I see the way my parents get treated. They come home tired and are treated badly by their bosses. I don't want that for me.

Pedro's dream is to own a business because he "really [has] a problem with people who disrespect what [he] represents." When asked what he represents, he answered: "Being Mexican." Pedro says that having his own business will allow him to make his own rules, and he won't allow anyone to put him down. Pedro's business interests are dual. He would like to either have a landscaping company or a sporting goods store. Landscaping represents a sector that he has been involved in through his family, and his interest in sporting goods manifests his

love of sports, mainly soccer. When asked to detail how he plans to accomplish his educational and occupational aspirations, Pedro said:

I only know what I hear from people. Like Rutgers, from the time I was little I always thought about going there. Like I know that to go to college you need financial aid because is very expensive. But in my condition, I don't think I would be eligible for financial aid. I don't know if money is going to be an issue.

At this point, Pedro does not see a need to know exactly how he plans to achieve some of his goals. He says that he knows he will go to college because he does not want to end up like his parents. Pedro then drew a parallel between his life and that of his parents, by detailing the ways in which his parents struggle in lower paying jobs and get abused by their employers because they are unauthorized. He continues to say that he won't stand for that in his future. While Pedro is clear about the fact that he does not want to be abused by an employer, when pressed to describe the type of life he would like to have, he describe it in terms of having a big house with a basketball court. When asked what type of salary would allow him to achieve this goal he said: "I want to have the type of job where people work in slippers, like in a Google company or something, just chilling, making a lot of money."

Pedro's uncertainty about how he will achieve his aspirations is closely related to his condition of illegality. Pedro feels that as an undocumented person he won't be able to do the things that others do. For instance, he explains how he is hoping that his family would be able to fix his immigration papers to reach his goals. Pedro says that if his parents fail he will have to do it himself:

I'm an American. I don't think they can kick me out just like that. Like I don't have to study to pass a citizenship test, that's my life, this is where I've been living my whole life. I've been living in America. I don't need to pass a test to prove that I am American.

Pedro feels strongly about his right to stay in the country even though his parents brought him illegally. He feels that he has earned the right to be allowed to stay, in comparison to other

immigrants who have spent less time in the country and do not possess the knowledge and the language skills that he has. To Pedro, being undocumented has not only limited his educational and occupational goals but also his freedom, and ironically, also kept him away from many dangers: “I don’t ever want to get caught by the police because I’m afraid of getting deported. Like I think that’s the reason I’ve never got involved with gangs and things like that. I just can’t take the risk.” While Pedro recognizes that being undocumented represents a clear barrier in his plans to go to a four-year college, he also appreciates that this same fact has directed his life in a more positive direction and away from crime. At this point, Pedro plans to begin getting the information he needs in order to be accepted into a four-year school, but his main hopes of accomplishing his dreams lie in his parents’ ability to secure a legal immigration status for him.

### **Daisy**

*I would like to be able to go to college and become a teacher, but I don’t think I can do that here. I think if I’m ever going to reach that goal I have to go back to Mexico and do it there. Like I know I can do it here, but financially it would be more difficult, more expensive, but even if I did it here, it would be useless, what would be the point? I would not be able to use it.*

Daisy describes herself as a fighter, someone who does not give up easily in the face of difficulties. At the same time, Daisy likes to enjoy the good things in life, “I like to dress well, go to nice places and just have good things.” She also says she has never been that good in school but that she gets by. Daisy was born in Tetelilla, a small village in Jonacatepec, Morelos, in 1992. Jonacatepec is a city in the Mexican state of Morelos with a total population of 14,600 inhabitants with an average completion rate of 7.9 among those older than 15 years of age (INEGI, 2011). The name Jonacatepec comes from the Nahuatl language and means “on the hill where there are onions.” Tetelilla itself has two primary schools and one secondary school,

while the entire municipality of Jonacatepec has four elementary schools and three secondary schools.

Daisy describes her time in Tetelilla as the best time in her life. She describes the freedom she had by saying she could run inside her house and play with her sister without having to worry about the neighbors. Daisy talks about her life in Tetelilla in terms of the carefree enjoyment, full of friends and family members. Daisy's border crossing experience began when her father decided to leave Tetelilla in 1997 because "he was tired of begging people for a job." When her father left, Daisy stayed behind with her mother and five-year-old sister. As in the case with many immigrant families, the head of the household usually leaves the comfort of the home first to try out life in the States. Once this person sees that it is possible to reunite the family, plans are made to move the remainder of the family across the border. However, sometimes the entire family is not reunited at the same time but in progressive stages.

In 1999 Daisy's father asked her mother to travel to the United States, leaving Daisy and her five-year-old sister with their maternal grandparents further separating the nuclear family. Before reuniting again with her parents in 2001, Daisy did not see her father for five years and her mother for three years. Early in 2001, Daisy's father decided to make the trip back to Mexico to bring back his girls. At that time, Daisy was 10-years-old. She describes her border crossing experience as the biggest adventure of her life.

When I crossed the border, I felt like I was going on a trip, a sort of vacation, an adventure, you're seeing places you've never seen before. You're not aware of the dangers, you are not aware of the seriousness of what you're doing. I remember thinking it was so exciting. I remember thinking, like oh yes, we are going to the States. That's just part of childhood innocence. Thank God we didn't have any struggles; we didn't have to walk for a long time. We really had a very easy experience.

Daisy talks about her actual border crossing with relative ease detailing how she was not aware of the ways in which this simple act would change her life. Daisy remembers just waiting eagerly to see her mother. Daisy continuously compares her positive experiences crossing the border with that of others who have been caught by the border patrol and sent back several times, others who have been abandoned by the coyotes in the dessert, and of others who have been robbed and women who have been raped. However, Daisy's crossing journey was quick and set apart by its simplicity:

From Morelos we took a bus to Puebla and then a plane from Puebla to Mexico City. From Mexico City we took another plane to Hermosillo. Once we got to Nogales, we stayed there for a night. The following day the coyotes took us to another house closer to the border so that we could be closer to where we needed to cross. Once they were ready, they made us walk for maybe an hour. Like we would walk five minutes to one house, 15 minutes to another house and than 30 minutes to another, but in total it wasn't more than an hour walk. At that time crossing the border was easier, after 9/11 everything got worse. Once they got us to Phoenix, from there we took a plane to LaGuardia Airport, New York.

Seeing her mother for the first time in three years was a great source of joy for Daisy, but the joy was not long lived. Once in the United States, Daisy realized that her life had changed and not necessarily for the better. She details how seeing her mother's place for the first time had a great impact on her young mind:

It was a big impression when I actually entered my mother's house. When I saw the neighborhood I thought to myself: "Where are the beautiful places here?" My life was really different here. Like my mom would tell us that we could not run in the apartment. She would tell me that I could not make much noise. Here we lived less comfortably than we did in Mexico. For example, in Mexico we had our own room; here we had to share the bedroom with my parents. Once you see the reality of what it is to live here, you feel differently.

Daisy's life changed in terms of the conditions in which she lived and the fewer accommodations she enjoyed. She also narrates that during her first two years in the States, she would continuously tell her mom that she wanted to go back. Daisy explains that her mom

would tell her to be patient because she had been given the special opportunity to get ahead in life. However, the frustration of being in a strange place clouded her judgment. She says: “When you’re that young, you don’t understand what your parents are saying, you can’t really comprehend what they mean. All you think about is, well, I had it over there, why can’t I have it here.”

But Daisy’s difficulties were not limited to the home environment. Daisy’s greatest struggles were in school and in trying to speak English. Daisy says that when she entered school in the United States her grades suffered because she was nervous all the time. She remembers not being able to concentrate, wondering how she was going to communicate in English. Daisy feels that not being able to speak English at that time made her a reclusive and “even quieter” person. Daisy particularly recalls how she felt not being able to speak English to other kids:

One day I was playing outside with my little sister and two other kids. We had only been here for about a week. We realize that these girls could speak both Spanish and English. Then we got into a little fight, you know like a kid fight, nothing really important. But then one of the girls started telling us that we were stupid, that we couldn’t speak English. She said things like: Why are you here if you can’t speak English, go back to your country. I felt bad; I just didn’t know what to say. They felt they were better than us; maybe they were a little bit because they could speak English and we didn’t know anything. Like when we were fighting they would say things to us in English, but they knew that we did not understand English, so why would they do that? I just remember that a lot.

Daisy is still bothered by her inability to defend herself against these attacks, even today she still wonders why she was alienated and made to feel less. Such experiences coupled with her knowledge of her unauthorized status have had an impact on her educational aspirations. Daisy says that being undocumented does not make her less but it means that you will have less because it interferes with a lot of dreams.

Daisy’s educational aspirations are to one day become an elementary school teacher.

Daisy loves young children and says she has the patience to be a great educator. However, at the

same time, Daisy explains that she cannot reach this goal in the States: first because she is undocumented, second because it would be financially impossible and third because she doesn't feel that she belongs in America. In Mexico, she believes that she has the possibility of reaching this dream, even though it would still be financially difficult, she would have at least some hope. Daisy doesn't know how much a college degree would cost her in the United States, but she says that given the fact that she is undocumented, she will not get any loans. Therefore, being unauthorized has had an impact on how she perceives she can potentially afford a college education.

Daisy feels that being a Mexican citizen she has more rights in her country to go to college. Daisy senses that in Mexico she would not be rejected by her differences and by her inability to "speak English perfectly." She says that since everyone in Mexico is the same, she would be better received and not deal with linguistic discrimination. In addition, Daisy adds that getting an advanced degree in the United States just does not make sense given her undocumented status: "It would be useless for me to do this here. What would be the point? I would not be able to use it." Daisy believes that being an undocumented immigrant she needs to try to make her life work in the States because her parents made a lot of sacrifices to bring her here. Daisy believes that she would be throwing away the opportunity to be in the States if she did not try to stay longer. However, at the same time, she feels that her future earning potential has been cut because she does not have the same work opportunities that other immigrants enjoy.

Daisy's educational aspirations are tied to her ability to use this education to enhance her income. Daisy understands that having a college degree is not a guarantee that she would be able to get legal employment because she understands the legal barriers that would prevent this. At the same time, Daisy does not have any concrete plans about going back to Mexico. At this

point, Daisy does not have any information regarding which schools in Mexico she could apply to become a teacher and what the cost of enrollment might be. She prefers to “just wait and see what happens” with her undocumented status.

### **Jonas**

*My biggest barrier in life is to be illegal. Like think about it, suppose I finish school and get my electrician certificate, but not a lot of companies are going to hire me because even though I have the certificate, I don't have my Social Security number. In my condition, I would never be able to work for a big company.*

Jonas describes himself as a hard working man, one who has always liked school and would one day like to own his business. Right now Jonas dedicates most his time to working in a Polish butcher shop and spending time with his girlfriend and one-year-old son. He says: “After I graduated high school, I gained weight because I only have time to eat at night when I get home and then I go to sleep; that’s my life now.” He continues: “My life is just work and work now.” Jonas was born in Veracruz, Mexico in 1990. Veracruz is a major port city and municipality on the Gulf of Mexico. The city is located in the central part of the state of Veracruz. In the census of 2010, Veracruz had a population of over 552,000 inhabitants with an average completion rate of 9.8 grades among those older than fifteen years of age (INGE, 2011).

Jonas’s border crossing story began when his father left Veracruz in 1999 to come to the United States with his new wife. Jonas’s life changed with his father’s departure because: “My father was everything I knew because I was not raised by my mother. My mother left my father when I was two months old, and I was raised by him and my grandparents.” So when Jonas’s father went back to visit Veracruz in 2004, Jonas was faced with the decision to follow him back to the United States or stay in Mexico with his grandparents:

After so many years of not seeing my father, I figured, if I let him go only God knows when I’ll see him again. So, I decided to come with him.

For some youth in Jonas's case, the decision to come to the States is made easier when they know that they will be reuniting with a loved and very much missed family member. This knowledge makes their border crossing journey and potential struggles more bearable and less of a decision on their part since it is natural for children to want to be with their parents, unless there is a history of abuse and/or neglectful circumstances.

Jonas's actual crossing across the Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona border was plagued by uncertainty and "bad luck." The trip began when Jonas and his father left Veracruz in 2004 and made it to Nogales in Northern Mexico, after passing through Puebla, Mexico City and Hermosillo by bus. Jonas describes the three attempts they made to cross the border in a very casual manner, and as he describes "simply part of the struggle to have a better life on the other side:"

My crossing was very difficult. The first time we tried, we left at night, and we walked for like 30 hours. We walked for an entire night and day to make it across the border. We could not carry anything with us. The only thing we had was canned food and some water. When we got across, the border patrol caught us and I was put in handcuffs, sent to a detention center and then back to Nogales.

Getting caught and officially detained by the border patrol did not scare Jonas, as he details that his father had prepared him well and had told him repeatedly that they could be detained. Once the couple was back in Nogales, Sonora, it was time to try crossing again:

Once we got back, my father contacted another coyote, and we tried to cross again. At one point, we had already crossed the border and we were hiding behind a bush for a while when the border patrol officers caught us again. This time, we did not get detained, they just sent us back to Nogales. The third time we tried, the coyote refused to pass us. He told my father that if he got caught again on the other side, he was going to jail because the border patrol had detained him too many times. So we had no choice but to go back to the hotel. At that time my father was getting really desperate because we had tried to cross three times and we had not been successful.

Crossing the border multiple times before succeeding happens to a multitude of unauthorized immigrants on a daily basis. However, more dangerous than being detained by the border patrol is the very serious risk of being abandoned in a deserted area while attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. Unauthorized immigrants put their lives and that of their young children in the hands of human smugglers and have no choice other than to trust these strangers to do the right thing. Jonas's coyote realized that he could get caught again, and before taking them across the desert, decided to send them back. Yet, many other immigrants have not been so lucky and have met with unscrupulous human smugglers who leave them behind when they feel threatened and/or are cornered by the border patrol.

Fortunately, Jonas made it across the border safely after 15 days of being on the road and after three tries at crossing the Nogales' border. Once in the United States, Jonas says that he had to adapt to living with a new family and that at the beginning this was difficult. Many times he felt isolated since his father and his stepmother already had two children on their own, so he felt emotionally detached. Nevertheless, after only two weeks of having arrived from Mexico, Jonas's father enrolled him in a middle school. Jonas recalls that his greatest fear was not being able to communicate:

This school looked different from what I was used to. The teachers, the students, the language, not being able to talk to anyone, all of that was difficult. I just felt very weird. I just could not get used to the environment, the friends. So it was hard for me to get accustomed to the language. Not knowing English, you can't speak to anyone, you can't ask any questions, you don't know where you're going; you just don't know anything.

The environment that Jonas describes was limiting to him because of his lack of English skills. Additionally, Jonas felt "out of place," "weird," as if he did not belong in this strange new community. This new setting was full of people, places and sounds he did not recognize. But this feeling of isolation mostly centered around his home and school environment because

around in the community he felt: “Comfortable because I didn’t really need to speak English around here, is only when I went to school that I felt like I could not do it.”

Now that he has obtained his high school diploma, Jonas feels glad that he was able to graduate, but at the same time feels the weight of having to support his own family being undocumented. Given this pressure, his educational and occupational goals have been severely restricted by his immigrations status:

Being illegal really blocks me. I mean, you can be prepared to do anything, but they won’t let you really get a job. Like being illegal doesn’t prevent me from getting a job, but being illegal prevents me from having a decent salary. In my condition, I would never be able to work for a big company.

Jonas’s insights into the repercussions of his condition of illegality are keen and pointedly accurate based on his educational and work experiences. Jonas understands the predicament of being unauthorized and wanting to advance his own occupational prospects. As a result, he has decided that the only way to reach his occupational goals is to have his own business. He plans to achieve this by first helping his father with the landscaping business he is trying to build and second to:

Get an electrician’s certificate. I think that I’m going to go to Lincoln Tech. There after like 14 months you get a certificate that says that you can do the job. Is really not that expensive, is only about \$20,000. Being an electrician, I would offer my services to people and people would hire me, so I would be my own boss and work on my own. That’s the only way out for me.

Jonas’s experiences in the work place have reinforced the fact that his undocumented status is not an impediment to living and getting a job in the States, but only to having a good salary. Therefore, he has resorted to having his own business in either one of two areas that are positively marketable for him. When asked about the ways in which he plans to create his own business, Jonas detailed how he has been working in landscaping for four years and how he is helping his father on the weekends build his clientele. This extra job allows him to gain more

experience on how to deal with customer service, and it gives him the opportunity of saving more money for his future goals. In terms of his plan to enroll in a vocational school, Jonas says that he is now saving enough money to be able to attend.

While Jonas feels positively hopeful about being able to reach his present goals and says that he has never been discriminated for being undocumented and/or of Mexican descent, he says he feels trapped in a situation he has no control over. He feels that he is danger of being manipulated by dishonest employers. Jonas describes the way his father was fired after ten years of working for a landscaping company. He relates that his father was fired because the employer did not want to give him a raise based on his level of expertise and experience simply because his father is unauthorized and could not fight for his rights. Jonas expresses frustration in the knowledge that there is nothing his father can do about this injustice and feels that he is vulnerable to the same type of abuse and mistreatment.

Understandably, Jonas feels uncomfortable the more he exposes himself to people outside his community. He says: “You always have something in the back of your head. You always fear that you might get caught and sent back.” This feeling prevents him from venturing too far outside “Small Town” and acts as a constant barrier in his life. In regard to possibly going back to his native Mexico, Jonas says that:

Mexico is very bad now with all the cartels. Like a couple of weeks ago in a road leading to my grandmother’s house, *Los Zetas* pretended to be cops and stopped people on pickup trucks and stole them. People either had to give up their keys or be killed. If this was not the case, I might go back, but I also think about the financial situation there is also not good.

Jonas continues to weigh his present situation as an undocumented immigrant and family man with the living conditions in his native Mexico, and he has concluded that for now, he will stay in the United States and try to realize some of his long-term aspirations. Jonas has a clear

understanding of the barriers he will face in trying to set up his own business and is presently working two jobs to be able to save enough money and go to an electrician's school. In addition, by working with his father, he is obtaining the necessary exposure to how to run a business and about different strategies to enhance customer service. In the end, Jonas understands that as an unauthorized person his life will continue to be difficult.

## **Dai**

*I don't think about being undocumented. I'm a normal person. I'm a regular person, a human being like anybody else. The only thing that makes me different is that I don't have the same things that other people have. For instance, I would like to visit Mexico, but I can't because if I did I couldn't come back. So I have less. Also in terms of my education and getting a good job, I really can't go to college being undocumented, for what? The people that have papers have more, more in terms of education, more in terms of jobs.*

Dai describes herself as a very stubborn, clever, but also outgoing young woman. She regrets dropping out of school when she was 16-years-old because at 20-years-old, she feels that her "time to go to school has passed." Dai's early years were spent in Mexico City. She was born in 1991 and was raised mostly by her grandmother in a small neighborhood in Mexico City. During the twelve years she was in Mexico, she says that her life was full of people who loved her. She has fond memories of her grandmother's dedication toward raising and guiding her. She vividly recalls when her mother first left Mexico to come to the United States when she was 9-years-old and how her grandmother became a fulltime mother to her.

Dai's border crossing experience began with her mother's departure in 2000. At that time her mother decided to cross the border because she needed a job to help raise and support her growing family, resulting in Dai being left with her grandmother and six-year-old brother. Dai describes being away from her mother as "no big deal because I had always lived with my

grandmother anyway.” Dai feels that her life truly changed when her mother went back to Mexico in 2003:

My mother went back to Mexico because my grandmother got very sick and somebody else had to take care of us. The first time my mother came to the States she met my stepfather, and when she went back to Mexico to take care of us, he went with her.

By coming to the United States, Dai’s mom found a way to financially provide for her family back in Mexico, but in addition, she was also able to form a new family which she introduced to Dai and her brother when she went back to Mexico. But life in Mexico had changed and Dai’s mother could not settle into her new life. As a result, in 2006 she decided to go back to the United States. During the three years her mother lived in Mexico, Dai recalls: “She would tell me that life here was really wonderful, that things here were great.” But Dai still refused to make the trip with her mother because: “I was really more used to living with my grandmother than my mom, so I didn’t want to come with her.”

But Dai had no real choice, and in 2006 the entire family made the trip from Mexico City to the Nogales border.

When we got there, we stayed in a house for one night, after that the coyotes took us out and they made us walk for like a half day. It was my stepfather, my little brother and I. We crossed in a group of seven people. The coyotes had already crossed my mother before us. They told my mother that they needed to get her across in a different group because our group was too large. My mother wasn’t happy with that, but she had to do it. After we got across the border to the United States, she was there waiting for us. That night we stayed in a hotel and the following day they put us on a truck and brought us here to New Jersey. That took about three days.

Dai describes her border crossing experience as positive and uneventful. She feels good that the border patrol did not catch her and that she did not have to walk a lot. While Dai crossed the Nogales border during the summer, she doesn’t recall being too hot since she remembers her stepfather carrying a big backpack with water and food for them. Once Dai’s family trip finally ended when they arrived in New Jersey, she says: “I imagined the United States as a very clean

place, very pretty and big. I guess I imagined this based on what I have seen on TV. But NJ was ugly to me; it just wasn't what I had expected, what my mother had told me."

Once her new life in the United States began, Dai found it very difficult to adapt. She recalls hating living in the States and from the first time she got here she remembers: "never liking the United States." She believes this was due in part to the fact that she had not wanted to come in the first place and she just wasn't interested in being here. Part of her animosity toward the country was partially due to the fact that she felt very isolated.

When we lived in Mexico, I had a lot of friends. I would go out every day to play with them outside. We would also go out a lot with my mother. She would take us to the park, to the movies, different places. But here I couldn't really do any of those things because my mother was working most of the time, and I had to stay in the apartment with my little brother.

During this time, Dai felt that her mother had deceived her and that her life back in Mexico was much better because she had more freedom. Nevertheless, she knew she was not going back, and after a week of having arrived from Mexico, Dai was enrolled in school, and this only exacerbated the problems at home.

Being in school was really hard for me because the building was really big. I just couldn't get used to anything. I didn't know anybody. I didn't speak the language, so I felt very strange. At first when I came into the school, I didn't even know why the bell was ringing. It was horrible.

The first couple of years in the United States proved a very difficult transition for Dai. She describes hating the United States. She explains that her problems stemmed from a very negative attitude about the sacrifices her mother made to bring the family across the border. She says that at that time she just did not want to give her mother a chance because she was not used to living with her. The stress she felt at home and at school translated into daily fights with her mother and by constantly rebelling against school authorities. The stress of having left loved ones, of living with her mother and stepfather in a strange country, and of being forced to learn a

new language in a new environment combined to transform Dai into someone who was anxious and tense most of the time.

The stress she felt not only affected her home life but also her academic performance. Dai recalls not being interested in her classes and simply hating school. At this time she began cutting classes and skipping school days altogether to hang out in the streets or in a friend's house. Dai speaks of her ultimate decision to dropout of school with regret and wishes she had never put her mother through such unpleasant experiences:

I didn't think I was getting more opportunities here, but in time I was able to change my mind. I was just blocked, like my mind didn't want to see beyond my emotions. I just did not think there was anything good about this place.

But after a year of being out of school, Dai realized that she needed to get her high school diploma and do something with her life. She then enrolled back in school and now feels that she is on track to graduate next year. Dai's educational aspirations have been affected by the stressors she has experienced but mostly because she believes that she is "getting too old" to still be in school. Her greatest impediments right now are that she feels that she has lost a lot of time outside of school and her undocumented status. She is self-consciousness of the fact that she will be graduating at the age of 21 and further senses that she is running out of time to get a career on track. Dai says that while she would like to go to a four-year college, she knows that her undocumented status would make this even more financially difficult for her. Instead, she has decided to go to a beauty school.

I know that there is an institute that all you need to have is a high school diploma. They prepare you very well, and after a year you take a test, and if you pass the test you get a certificate and with that certificate you can get a job. I am not worried about paying for the school because is not that expensive and my mom told me that she would help me pay for it. So my mom is supporting me with that.

At this point, Dai thinks that the best opportunity to get her life back on track is to attend a beauty school. Dai feels a sense of urgency in doing this because during the time she dropped out of school she worked in several different factories and vividly recalls that:

The work was very hard. I could not rest or go to the bathroom a lot because they would get mad. It was really very difficult work, and I don't want to do that ever again. So that's part of my incentive for going to a beauty school and getting the certificate because I want to have a job where I can make some more money and not work as hard.

Dai's work experiences have shown her that life as an undocumented immigrant working in a factory is difficult and demanding, yet produces little monetary returns. But in addition, Dai knows that being undocumented and working in a factory is dangerous because:

Being undocumented you are never safe. Like my mom tells me the stories of people that have worked in factories during immigration raids and are taken to prison and then back to Mexico. That's not fair because all they were doing was working. They weren't doing anything wrong, but it doesn't matter, if they get caught they have to go back; they have no right to stay here. So not having papers affects me because you are always in danger. You're always taking a risk.

Dai is well aware of the consequences of her undocumented status and she understands the limiting nature of her condition and the dangers she is exposed to in the workplace. However, Dai feels that she is well-positioned to become a beautician and be able to find a job in this area.

Being undocumented is not a problem for me to get the job I want because I have seen people that have gotten the certificates and have gotten jobs. So I know that I will be able to find a job doing that.

Being undocumented does not represent a major limiting factor for Dai. She describes undocumented persons as: "normal people." She says that being undocumented does not make you different in any significant way because you are still a "human being like anybody else. The only thing that makes me different is that I don't have the same things that other people have." Dai narrows down the impact of her undocumented status to two major areas; first, when she illustrates that she would like to visit Mexico, but that she really can't because if she did she

would not be able to come back. Second, she explains the impact of her unauthorized status in terms of getting an education and a good paying job. She says: “I really can’t go to college being undocumented. So, the people that have papers have more, more in terms of education, more in terms of jobs.”

While Dai explains that her unauthorized status represents many barriers in her future life, she feels excited about the possibility of being able to reach her educational and occupational aspirations within a year after graduating high school. Dai no longer has dreams of going back to Mexico. She says that she would like to go back to Mexico to visit one day, but that she knows that she would not be able to live there again. Her thinking stems from the realities she has experienced in the United States. First, she says that while at first she hated living in this country, she has never felt discriminated and that living in Small Town is comforting to her because “everyone looks the same.” Second, Dai feels that it would be a waste of time for her time to go back to Mexico when she has fought so hard to finally be pleased with her present life. At this point, Dai’s future plans do not include going back to Mexico but instead to graduate high school, attend a beauty school, and continue learning English.

## **Gus**

*My dream is also to be an engineer. But I don’t think this is a realistic dream for me right now because here in the States you need to have your papers to continue studying. Since I don’t have those papers, I can’t do it. But if I lived in Mexico, I could go to school, and I would not have any problems.*

Gus describes himself as a hardworking man. He says that he likes to spend most of his time outdoors riding his bike or playing soccer with the local team when he is not working. Gus also says that while he knows he is undocumented, he does not think about it because he is too busy working and living a “normal life.” Gus was born in Tlaxcala, and he crossed the border

alone with his 16-year-old brother in 2007 when he was 17-years-old. Tlaxcala is located in east-central Mexico. It is bordered by the states of Puebla to the north, east and south; Mexico City to the west; and Hidalgo to the northwest. In the census of 2010, Tlaxcala had a population of over 89,000 inhabitants with an average completion rate of 8.8 grades among those older than fifteen years of age (INGE, 2011).

Gus's border crossing story began early in 2000 when his parents decided to leave five children behind with their maternal grandmother and to travel to the United States to be able to better support the family. But the five children, varying in ages from six to 17-years-old were left in the maternal household with yet another family, Gus' uncle, his wife and children. Gus details that once his father left, "my uncle thought that he was going to tell me what to do. He was acting like my father." This tug-of-war relationship made family dynamics even more difficult. Since Gus was the eldest, he felt that he should have had more influence over his other brothers, but his uncle would not allow him to take care of his brothers and to serve as the role model he wanted to be.

As a result of the many conflicts that were waged, early in 2007 Gus and his uncle had a physical confrontation in which his 16-year-old brother also became involved, as a result, Gus' parents decided that it was best for him to leave Mexico and to cross the border to the United States with his brother. Gus remembers this moment with excitement:

I was very happy that they've decided to help me come to the States. I thought that was the best thing that they could've done because in Mexico I was getting in a lot of trouble. I was very excited to come to the States because I've always wanted to see the place and also because I missed my parents. I hadn't seen them for about eight or nine years. I would talk to them on the phone every Sunday but talking to someone on the phone is not the same as living with them. Especially your parents, you miss them."

Gus' journey to the United States was a grateful reprieve from the life he had been living. He had a strong desire not only to reunite with his parents, but he was eager to begin a new life.

Therefore, in 2007 Gus and his brother traveled by bus to Mexico City. Once they arrived to Mexico City, they took a plane to Nogales. Once they got to Nogales, Gus contacted the coyote that his parents had arranged to transport them across the border. But crossing the border was not a straightforward endeavor.

The coyote that helped us cross the border was very experienced, but even still we got caught by the migra<sup>4</sup> as we were waiting to be picked up by a truck. When we were being put in the truck to send us back to Nogales, my brother escaped, he just ran and went back across the border to Mexico. The rest of us were taken to a detention center in the United States' side. There they kept us for about a day. After this they send us back to the Nogales Mexican side. When I was detained by the border patrol, I wanted to call my parents but they would not let me. I could not get in touch with anyone. When immigration catches you trying to cross the border you lose a lot of your rights. Like a woman that was caught with us, she took her cell phone out and they took it from her so that she could not call anyone.

After being arrested by the border patrol and detained for one day without being able to communicate with his parents and not knowing what had happened to his brother, Gus was relieved to be back on the Mexican side, where he was able to find his brother and call his parents. But failing the first time did not stop Gus from trying again. He says: "I was even more determined to get across." This resilience paid off the following day when the same coyote helped them cross the border, this time successfully. Gus details that his second crossing was along a very narrow stretch and that they did not walk for more than two hours. As others have experienced, Gus could not bring anything with him only a gallon of water. From the time they left Mexico to the time they arrived in New Jersey and met their parents, these two minors were on the road for a month and a half.

Arriving safely to New Jersey and seeing their parents for the first time in nine years was a source of great happiness to both brothers. But at the same time, Gus says that he knew that life in the States was going to be very different from what it was in Mexico:

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<sup>4</sup> Migra: Spanish word meaning immigration.

I knew that my life was going to be better once I crossed the border. I knew that being in the States I was going to have more opportunities. When I got to New Jersey I remember feeling very excited that I had left my life in Mexico behind.

Being happy and excited about the beginning of his new life helped Gus reconcile many of the unexpected things he found in the States. For example, he details how he expected the cities to be cleaner and prettier, but that they were not. Gus also describes how much he missed the freedoms he had in Mexico:

Like I could do a lot of things. I could go out anytime. Here is just different, there're a lot of restrictions especially for people like me. Like being a Mexican citizen I can "*hacer y deshacer*" "do and un-do." Like here I can't drive. I am afraid. But in Mexico I used to drive without a license, but here I just can't do it.

While Gus describes how much he enjoys being in the States, he also understands that as an undocumented person he cannot act irresponsibly. This awareness stems from a need to stay out of the authorities' radar. He does not want to do anything that would attract attention to himself or his family.

After arriving to the States, Gus says that his mother gave him time to relax. During this time he says that he met a lot of people in the neighborhood and that he felt welcomed by the community. Gus says that the fact that most people in the community speak Spanish have made it easier on him. He even began playing soccer with the community's local team. Gus did not immediately enter school because he says that his parents did not know how to enroll him and whether it was safe. Therefore, during the three months Gus was not in school, he worked cleaning offices. Gus' working experiences during this time reinforced the fact that he could make a living even though he did not have legal immigration papers. Gus felt that he was making good money. Gus also felt good about the fact that as the eldest he was now working and being able to contribute to the family as well as send money back to Mexico.

However, while working and making money made Gus feel useful, he also began to realize that if he wanted to make more money he needed to have a high school diploma. This compelled him to tell his parents that he wanted to enter high school and get his degree. With his parents' support, Gus enrolled in the local high school:

Being in school made me feel good because I knew I was doing the right thing, but at the same time, I felt very nervous because I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me, and I did not know if I could do it. Like, I did not know any English, and I felt bad about this. The good thing was that the school had a bilingual program, and I was able to understand most of my classes.

Gus describes his educational experiences with a very positive tone. He has good memories of his time in high school and says that while being able to complete the degree has been difficult, he says that he has been lucky because his teachers have helped him a lot. Gus feels that his life is headed in the right direction and speaks positively about his future:

Now that I am in the States, I have more opportunities to work and make money. Here I also have more time for myself. My parents do not expect me to work, so right now I am focusing on finishing my high school degree this summer. After I finish I will continue to study English in a vocational school.

Gus's educational aspirations are to sharpen his English skills. He feels that being able to communicate with everyone is what is going to help him get a good job and potentially earn more money. He says that undocumented immigrants cannot get better jobs because a lot of them do not speak English, and this makes them more vulnerable to abuses. Gus details that as an unauthorized immigrant he knows that he does not have the same opportunities as everybody else. For instance, he talks about his desire to become an engineer, but at the same time, he says that this is not a realistic dream for him because he would need papers to continue studying and since he does not have them he cannot achieve this dream.

When Gus was asked why he would like to be an engineer he said: "Because he just tells his workers what to do." When asked to detail what educational requirements he would need to

become an engineer, Gus said that he did not know. Gus's attraction to engineering stem from his work experiences back in Mexico, where he was a part-time construction helper. Gus is drawn to the idea of a profession in which you "don't get your hands dirty and you just tell people what to do and they listen."

Hence, Gus' immediate educational aspirations are to continue studying English. This goal is tied into his occupational goal of making more money than his father and being able to help his family. Gus' occupational goals are vague. While he dreams of being an engineer, he understands that his conditional of illegality and his ability to pay are impediments. Gus does not foresee a problem finding a job because he has been able to find employment doing odd jobs. As a result, Gus is not concerned about his job prospects and feels that is better for him to focus on speaking better English because this is what would ultimately help him to become more marketable and find better job opportunities.

### **Josie**

*I have two dreams, one is to be a surgeon, and the other one is to be an accountant, one of them is truly impossible. Being undocumented and getting a higher education is really going to be hard for me because I can't get any loans to attend college. That situation may cause me to "pause" my studies. Right now I think my only possibility is to go to a community college. In there they don't check your legal status.*

Josie describes himself as an outgoing person who likes to work hard to get what he wants. "Negative experiences just push me to try harder." Josie says that he is "very friendly" and likes to help new immigrants by talking to them and telling "them what they should expect while living here." At the same time, he deeply misses the way his life was back in Mexico, mostly the family members he left behind. Josie was born in San Pedro, Cholula in the Mexican state of Puebla. Josie describes his life in Mexico as very comfortable since they had a nice big

house with plenty of room to run around, but when the entire family left Mexico, they lost the property they had.

Josie's parents' decision to come to the United States was precipitated in 2006 by emotional and personal events within the family. He narrates the way his mother found out that his father was having an affair and how devastated the entire family was. Josie's father, not wanting to lose his family, offered to move them to the States hoping that distance would remedy the situation. Ultimately, their decision to cross the border was about keeping the family unit and not due to impending financial strains. Nevertheless, this decision angered Josie because he felt betrayed by his father, and additionally felt that he now had to leave his extended family and soccer team friends because of his father's mistake. However, at the same time, he details that he did not fight the decision his parents had made because as a teenager he knew that he had to be with his family.

The family made the trip as single unit, three brothers, father and mother, took a bus from Puebla to Mexico City and from there a plane to Coahuila and later to Piedras Negras, a small isolated town near the border. At the time he crossed the border in 2006 Josie was 14-years-old. He describes his border crossing experience as "going camping. I did not actually see any danger in what I was doing at that time."

The coyotes made us leave at night so when we started crossing the desert it was nighttime. We walked for about three hours, then the guide told us to hide because he could see lights from the border patrol. We hid behind a bush. On the second day the same thing happened, we walked all day and at night we hid because we did not want to get caught by the border patrol. But on the third day, our guide seemed to be lost and we were running out of food, so I got a little scared. But finally after walking for about six hours we got close to a highway and a truck picked us up.

Paralleled to the crossing experiences of others, Josie could not take any valuables with him, only a small backpack with water and some canned food for the family. Josie's

recollection of his border crossing is positive. He says that he was well-prepared to cross the border because back in Mexico: “I used to watch a soap opera that showed how people struggle to cross the border. But, I think we were very lucky because nothing happened to us. The worst thing was when we saw a snake in the desert. So, in my opinion, it was a very positive experience; I did not even get tired.”

For the most part, Josie had imagined the United States as a good place, one in which he could do anything he wanted, if he worked hard. He thought that coming to the United States was a new opportunity for him to reach newer and higher goals. Josie related the way in which in Mexico he have had excellent prospects of becoming a professional soccer player since one of his uncles was in a major team and was training him. But coming to the United States he had to give up that goal and focus on something else entirely.

However, having arrived in the United States and settling into his new environment, Josie felt nervous about having to go to school and the prospect of communicating with people he could not understand. Josie describes this fear of talking to people as a sort of phobia because he was deeply afraid of anyone talking to him and his inability to understand them. This caused him a lot of anxiety as he also expected to be mistreated in school because:

“In Mexico I used to watch TV program that showed how Mexicans suffered in the States, it showed how they were exploited, mistreated, abused and even hit by other people. So, I thought that in kids in school were going to hit me. But when I entered school I entered with my cousin, and she helped me to meet new friends and to understand that no one was going to do anything bad to me.”

Having the emotional and social support of a relative at the time he entered school alleviated a lot of Josie’s anxieties. His cousin was able to guide him and keep him grounded in the knowledge that nothing bad was going to happen to him in school. His cousin also helped

him in building a network of friends, which in time grew and made him feel better about his surroundings and more secure in his ability to learn English.

At this time, learning English became the focus of Josie's life. He felt that without knowing to speak English he would be more vulnerable to abuses and he really wanted to integrate into the American mainstream. Therefore, Josie decided to immerse himself in English by studying hard and by watching and listening to TV in English. However, this exposure also showed him that Mexicans were not treated equally. He relates:

“One day in the news they were talking about a Mexican undocumented immigrant that had gotten beat up by a group of men. Then I also started seeing immigration raids in several factories. Another time I saw the case of a woman that got abused by her husband, but because she was undocumented, no one paid attention to her. So hearing things like that made me realize that things here weren't like I had imagined, that things were more negative.”

By watching and listening to these experiences on TV, he began to realize that discrimination was a real issue in his life. Josie feels that being undocumented only exacerbates the discrimination that Mexicans are exposed to on a daily basis. Josie explains that undocumented immigrants are continuously blamed for many criminal activities when most of the people committing horrible crimes are born in this country. Josie feels that there are a lot of people who are legally in the United States that do not want to go to school and have a better life. He says:

Even the word undocumented is a bit discriminatory because we are all human beings and we all have feelings even though we may have a different color skin or nationality. Like when there is a natural disaster or something bad happens, it is natural to want to help others. So, I always thought that we were all the same. I used to think that when I was younger, but as I've gotten older, I have realized that people hate us, that there is a lot of racism, hatred, and injustice.

Josie's experiences have reinforced in him that his undocumented status is used against him as a way to separate him from others, to make him feel different. He feels that being undocumented virulently labels people as subhuman. He narrates:

Like discrimination happens here for any reason. When I first got to this town I realized that there was a local soccer team, and I wanted to join. Since I couldn't speak English at that time, I asked my uncle if he could go with me to find out what I needed to do. My uncle then started talking to the soccer coach, who was a White guy, and the coach started asking him things like where was I born? and my uncle told him that I was born in Mexico. When the coach heard that, he did not like it, and he said that he did not want any undocumented Mexicans in his team, that he only wanted kids that had been born in the States.

Experiencing such negative rejections can have a detrimental impact on people's lives. However, when Josie reflected on this event, he realized that he had been unprepared to face the discrimination he would encounter in the States. Nevertheless, while he felt unwanted for his condition, at the same time, he realized that he could not let this incident depress him and subsequently determine his future. Instead, Josie began turning the negativity he saw around him as a key incentive to continue pushing harder in this life. He started thinking that he had to be really strong and develop a very positive mind to not easily give up.

The discriminatory experiences due to his illegal status have made Josie try harder and understand that going to school and getting a higher education may be the only way for him to get ahead in life. While Josie's educational aspirations are to go to college, he also weighs this desire with his inability to get college loans and not be able to pay for tuition on his own. Instead of "pausing" his studies to work full-time, Josie says that his only choice is to go to a community college because they do not check anyone's legal status.

Josie plans to go to a community college to study accounting. He has selected accounting because he feels that it is a practical career in terms of the time he has to spend pursuing it and the money he can potentially make. In order to do this, he plans to take the basic

required courses in the States but finish the rest of the career in Mexico. Josie plans to go back to Mexico to finish his studies first because back home he would be able to afford his studies, and second, he has a good chance of obtaining a student visa to come back to the United States legally. While this scenario is not ideal, he says it may be the only way for him to get ahead in life since he knows that the biggest hurdle in finishing a four-year college education here is money.

In terms of his ability to pay for his community college education, Josie detailed that he has worked in a florist for years and that he has already saved enough money to pay for this portion of his education. He plans to continue working part-time as he attends the community college and to continue saving money to finish his education in Mexico.

## **Lulu**

*I really wish I could go to college, but I know that I can't do that here [in the United States]. Right now I am working in a factory with my cousin, and I don't make enough money to pay for college. I know that if I could pay I would not be working but going to school, but being what I am, I have to settle for less.*

Lulu is a 21-year-old young woman who enjoys spending time with her cousins during family picnics at the park and going swimming. Lulu was on her high school swimming team for almost three years and says she misses the days when she did not have to worry about going to work to make a living. Lulu describes herself as an outgoing person, who enjoys spending time with others. Lulu was born in Puebla in 1990. Lulu talks with sadness about growing up in Puebla and vividly remembers the freedom she had to explore and to go out with her friends. She says: "When I lived in Puebla, I did not have to worry about anything. Everyone in school liked me, and I was very popular." But in 2003 her life changed forever when her father was killed by a member of Los Zetas.

Lulu talks about this experience as “the most horrible thing that can ever happened to anyone. My father was killed because he did not want to give up the money he had just been paid. So, they decided to kill him, take his money and car.” Dealing with the pain of having to bury her beloved father at the age of 13 and knowing that her mother had been left alone to deal with the responsibility of raising Lulu and her three other siblings, Lulu insisted that her mother report the crime to the police so that they could arrest the assassins. But as Lulu explains, everything backfired:

Someone from the neighborhood told them that we were going to go to the police, so the night before we bury my father, they came to the house and told us that we had 24 hours to leave our house and that if we did not they could come back and kill us.

Lulu’s mother was paralyzed with fear for her life and that of her children. Immediately, she reached out to her aging mother who lived in the neighboring town of Cholula and asked her to take Lulu’s three younger siblings because she and Lulu had to flee out of the state. This is the way Lulu’s journey into the United States began.

After her father was buried, Lulu’s mother put her three little brothers on a bus to Cholula to live with their grandmother. Minutes later, she and Lulu boarded another bus to Mexico City headed towards, Nogales- Sonora. Lulu remembers that she did not have time to think about the fact that she was leaving her friends behind because she was physically exhausted and numbed with pain. After traveling by bus for four days, they finally arrived at the border town where her mother found a coyote that was willing to transport them both across the border.

Crossing the border was not hard at all, or maybe I just don’t even remember it very well because I didn’t even know what was happening with my life. I do remember that we crossed at night and that we were each carrying two gallons of water. We walked for about six hours, and early in the morning we arrived at an old house on the United States’ side. During the time I was crossing, I was just trying to survive, so I don’t remember a lot of what happened at that time.

Having safely arrived to the United States, Lulu says that she was able to breathe more easily for the first time in over two weeks. While she was weakened with exhaustion, she knew that in the United States her life was not in danger. Since they had used up her father's life savings crossing the border, Lulu and her mother were forced to rent a room in a dilapidated part of Nogales, Arizona and get jobs in order to make enough money to travel to New Jersey where her mother's cousin lived.

After three months, the couple earned enough money for travel expenses and for two months of rent in her cousin's apartment. This second part of the journey was uneventful, but Lulu describes being very depressed when they left Arizona because she knew she might never again go back to Mexico. After three days of traveling by bus, the couple finally arrived to New Jersey where they were well-received and given a nice, clean room to live in and new clothes to put on. But Lulu's mother did not have time to relax, she immediately found a job and started to save up money to get her three children out of Mexico and across the border as soon as possible.

Lulu explains that the hardest part of living in the States was being away from her family. She admits that without her cousin's support they would have never made it to New Jersey and that without her advice and help she may not have enrolled in school. Her cousin enrolled her in the town's middle school because her mother was busy working all the time and did not have time for anything. Lulu said:

When I entered the middle school, I was scared because I did not know what to expect. Back in Puebla I had so many friends, and now here I was alone and I could not tell anyone about my problems and what had happened to me. This made it really bad for me. So, at the beginning, I was very quiet and my grades began to suffer because I did not know what I was supposed to be doing.

Dealing with the traumatic assassination of her father, the threats made on her mother's life and having to flee their own house, Lulu never had the time to mourn the losses she had experienced

in less than one year. Entering a new school only added to the stressful events in her life and she felt lost and disoriented —without any real guidance. Also, at this time, Lulu did not have the communicative tools to ask for the academic help she needed which led directly to the decline in her grades.

But Lulu did not give up, and while her grades were anything but stellar she persevered and made it to high school. Lulu explains that her first year in school was the hardest one because she could not communicate with people and did not have any friends. However, in time this changed and with her cousin's support at home she began to learn more English and to have a few friends in the neighborhood.

After about two years of being in the States, I started feeling better about myself. I also began to see how my mother was less depressed, and this made me feel good. [...] My mother did bring my brothers after four years. That was the happiest day of my life! When we were all together again.

Being a high school student, Lulu began to feel pressured to cut classes and not do school work. Lulu explains: "I had a boyfriend then and I almost fell into temptation." Lulu talks about the pressures she experienced to become sexually active and how she refused to do that because "my father raised me good morals and my mother did not bring me here for that. She brought me here to protect me, and I knew I could not throw my life away with some boy." Lulu's memory of her father and knowing the struggles her mother had endured acted as a protective shield to keep her on track in school and focused on the best path for her future endeavors.

However, being close to graduating high school, Lulu experienced another setback in her life. She says: "Everyone in school started talking about college, and I was excited because I had always wanted to be a teacher, so I started talking about it too." Lulu's traumatic experiences had created a disconnect between her long-term expectations and what she could realistically

accomplish in the United States. Lulu had never given much thought to the negative effects that being an undocumented immigrant could have on her life and on her goal of becoming a teacher.

One day I talked to my mom about going to college, and she told me that I could not go because I was illegal and we could not afford it. Before that day, I had just never thought about it. I knew I was illegal, but I just did not know how bad that really was. Like what it really meant for me and my mom. I mean, my mom always had a job and she saved money to bring my brothers, so I guess I did not think that being illegal was going to affect me. But it has.

Realizing the dire consequences of her undocumented status was a blow to Lulu's educational aspirations. She had hoped to go to college to become a kindergarten teacher and be able to help her mother by moving into their own house one day. Now that she understood that going to a four-year college was financially out of her reach, she became depressed and isolated again.

Lulu explained: "Thank God that when I found out that I wasn't going to college because I can't get student loans, I had already earned enough credits to graduate. Otherwise, I think I may have dropped out." Lulu's insights into the impact of her condition of illegality are poignant. She explained how she suddenly stopped dreaming and began to realize that her future was to work in a factory and nothing else. Lulu also explains that even if she finds a way to pay for her college education, being undocumented she would never be able to find a job and practice her craft.

Having graduated high school almost two years ago, Lulu's life plans are at a standstill. From the time she graduated high school, she has worked in a clothing factory with her cousin. This extra income has allowed her and her mother to finally move into their own apartment where Lulu has her own room "with a door and a lock." Being able to work has given Lulu independence and a sense of recognition from her mother, whom she says: "Is very proud that I did not turn out like other girls, getting pregnant young and not finishing school."

In terms of her educational and occupational aspirations, Lulu says that since she likes children so much she is looking into the possibility of working as a babysitter and/or in a daycare facility. At this point, she is keeping her options open and is actively looking for information on how she may accomplish this new plan. Still, she is clear that she will not go to college: first because she is not able to afford it, and second, because even if she obtained a diploma she would not be given employment as an undocumented person.

Yes, I know of other people like me who have gone to four-year and two-year colleges, and you know what, they've wasted their money because once they graduate they can't get a legal job. So, either way they end up working in a factory like I am now, but worse because they spent all that money and wasted all that time for nothing. I am not going to do that! I can't afford to waste my time like that. If I don't have papers, I am not going to college.

Lulu has made up her mind about going to college and presently her dreams for the future do not include an advanced degree but instead looking for better job opportunities, better working hours and looking into the possibility of adjusting her immigration status. Lulu's life is in a "wait and see" period. She has found great comfort in her ability to help her mother financially and feels that thus far she has made many right decisions in her life and hopes to continue to improve her life by working hard "the way my father taught me." While her future life no longer entails a college education, Lulu does not speak bitterly about this fact but has come to understand that due to her circumstances this is not a realistic expectation for her. Instead of feeling depressed and gloomy about her situation, Lulu is actively looking for avenues to improve her present life with great practicality and logic of spirit. She says that if she is able to live comfortably and have the security of a steady and good paying job that she will be satisfied.

## CHAPTER VI

### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

#### **Introduction**

A separate chapter for findings and interpretations has been dedicated in this dissertation to examine the similarities and differences among participants. In this analysis, the voices of all ten participants are placed in a larger context and are used to enhance an in-depth examination of the qualitative research questions that originally guided this study. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the emergent themes that became apparent through the lens of the research questions: 1) Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school? 2) What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals? 3) How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?

Table 6.1 presents a snapshot of the participants that includes their age, place of birth, population and school completion rate in their native towns, present level of education, as well as their border crossing dates and entry points. Looking at these overall trends is crucial in understanding how border-crossing experiences—where they take place, the conditions in which they take place and at what age—become the first transformative life events as the youth enter the United States and become undocumented in the land of opportunity.

Analyzing Table 6.1, it is clear that most of the youth have attained a level of education well beyond the average typical of their birth locations. In terms of having already achieved more education than that of the average youth in their places or birth (INGE, 2011) and their parents (Table 5.1), the participants expressed in their narratives that coming to the United States had enhanced their educational opportunities and provided an avenue to eventually make more

money and help relatives back in their homelands. Looking broadly at the demographic trends, other major similarities are apparent, e.g., that most of the youth crossed the border at the same entry point —Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona. In addition, it can be noted that most of the youth came from urban centers in Mexico, six of them from the state of Puebla. Moreover, most made the difficult crossing between ten and fifteen years of age during 2004 and 2007. The youth are also similar in the total number of average years they have spent in the U.S., i.e., between five and seven years. Clearly, these youth share many similarities in their border crossing experiences and places of origin.

Table 6.1

*Demographic Information Showing Participants' Age, Place of Birth, Population and School Completion Rate in Their Native Towns, Present Level of Education, Border Crossing Dates and Entry Points*

Name	Age	Born	Population	School Completion Rate	Present Level of Education	Crossing Date	Crossing Point
Jovani	19	San Gabriel Chilac, Puebla (Rural)	14,454	6.0	12 <sup>th</sup>	2005	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona
Karen	19	Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla (Rural)	72,799	7.7	12 <sup>th</sup>	2006	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona
Ema	19	Puebla, Puebla (Urban)	1,539,819	10.3	12 <sup>th</sup>	2005	Ciudad Juárez
Pedro	18	San Andrés, Cholula, Puebla (Urban)	100,500	10.3	11 <sup>th</sup>	1994	Ciudad Juárez
Daisy	20	Tetelilla, Morelos (Rural)	14,600	7.9	12 <sup>th</sup>	2001	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona
Jonas	21	Veracruz, Veracruz (Urban)	552,000	9.8	12 <sup>th</sup>	2004	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona

Dai	20	Mexico City (Urban)	8,851,000	10.5	12th	2006	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona
Gus	21	Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala (Urban)	89,000	11.3	12th	2007	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona
Josie	19	San Pedro, Cholula, Puebla (Urban)	120,500	9.5	12th	2006	Piedras Negras, Coahuila de Zaragoza
Lulu	21	Puebla, Puebla (Urban)	1,539,819	10.3	12 <sup>th</sup>	2003	Nogales, Sonora - Nogales, Arizona

### Research Question 1

#### Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their educations beyond high school?

The educational and occupational aspirations of undocumented youth are compiled in Table 6.2. It is clear that all of the participants want to continue their education beyond their high school diplomas. This information is equally consistent with the quantitative findings (Chapter IV). Specifically, most of the youth aspire to obtain a vocational certificate, a two-year college, and/or an apprenticeship. All of the youth clearly plan to advance their present level of education, and the aspirations they currently have range from that of being a medical doctor in the field of pediatrics, to becoming a teacher, to becoming an electrician. These various educational aspirations will undoubtedly lead the youth into unique and separate occupational paths. In terms of the reasons why the youth want to continue their education despite their condition of illegality, the following were highlighted throughout the interviews: First, their desire to work in jobs that are better than those of their parents, and second, their need to be respected and recognized within the family structure.

Table 6.2

*Participants' Information Showing Their Educational and Occupational Aspirations, as well as Their Achievement and Financial Plans*

Name	Educational Aspirations	Occupational Aspirations	Achievement Plans	Financial Plans
Jovani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a metallurgic certified worker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue working in factory</li> <li>• Get a better paying job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a vocational school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> <li>• Make \$20.00 an hour</li> </ul>
Karen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a pediatrician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work for 1 year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No clear plan to attend college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> </ul>
Ema	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become an interior designer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work for 1 year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend an interior design school in NYC</li> <li>• Get an internship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> </ul>
Pedro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a businessman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business owner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not definite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House with a baseball court</li> </ul>
Daisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not definite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not definite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> </ul>
Jonas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a certified electrician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help build his father's landscaping business</li> <li>• Get an electrician's job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a vocational school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> </ul>
Dai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a beautician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a job as a beautician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a vocational school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother will pay for school</li> </ul>
Gus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To learn more English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a better job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a vocational school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents will pay for school</li> </ul>
Josie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become an accountant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get an accounting job in the U.S. and/or Mexico</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a community college for two years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money for school</li> </ul>
Lulu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a daycare provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a better paying job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not definite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save money to have a better life</li> </ul>

### **Better employment opportunities and working conditions**

The youth demonstrated a clear knowledge of the struggles their parents have experienced working as undocumented immigrants in the United States. The youth described at various points the ways in which their parents have been mistreated and made to work extremely long hours in abusive conditions for very little monetary compensation. For instance, Pedro detailed the ways in which his parents' working environment has affected the way he sees his future employment. Pedro says that he would like to own a business because he sees the ways his parents come home exhausted and "are treated badly by their bosses." Pedro says that while his parents have worked in a bakery store for years, they were recently let go and now his mother is unable to find another job. Ema also detailed how her mother needs two jobs to be able to support her and her little sister and how she does not get paid for any over-time. Jonas further explains the ways in which his father has been abused by his employer for ten years as a landscaper and was recently fired "because suddenly, his boss did not want to employ illegals." The youth expressed their frustration at seeing their parents "stuck in the same job" for years and never being able to look for another job for fear that their unauthorized status might be reported.

Dai narrated her experiences working with her mother in a factory during the time she dropped out of school. Dai recounted how "the work was very hard" and she could not rest or go to the bathroom because the bosses would get mad. She remembers the working conditions as being horrible. Dai, Jonas and Jovani also talked of the fear of deportation, particularly when working in factories. Factories and companies where more than ten people work are extremely vulnerable to random immigration raids. In recent years, immigration raids have become so common in factories and towns where immigrants live and are employed that The Department of

Immigration and Customs Enforcement now even conducts immigration raids in public places such as street fairs and day festivals (Paynter, 2011).

Their vulnerability to being deported has driven many of the youth to look for educational opportunities that would lead them to acquire the occupational freedoms their parents do not have. For instance, Ema, Dai, Jonas, Gus, Pedro and Josie talked about the possibility of having their own businesses or/and working independently by pursuing careers that would allow them to be their own bosses, such as being an interior designer, an electrician, a beautician, an engineer or an accountant so that they can have more control over their employment lives.

While some of the undocumented youth seemed disenchanted with having a 9-5 job because of their exposure to being deported and the abuses they may encounter, they clearly stated that being self-employed they would have more control and be highly satisfied with their lives. However, being self-employed comes with great challenges that the youth do not yet realize. To illustrate, studies on the work habits and perceptions of self-employed people report that they work under a lot of pressure and find their work stressful as they have to work long hours and most times come home exhausted (Blanchflower, 2004; Jamal, 1997). Additionally, self-employed workers report being under constant strain, losing sleep over worries and placing more weight on work than on leisure (Bradley & Roberts, 2004). In this sense, recent research suggests that some individuals who dream of having their own business during early adulthood may have an unrealistically “rosy view” of what it is like to run a business rather than staying with the comparative security of being an employee (Blanchflower, 2004).

Given these employment facts, a surprisingly high proportion of undocumented youth said they would prefer to set up their own businesses. Yet, the reality is that most undocumented

immigrants end up in the service industry and that most of the jobs they go into are the direct result of having friends and relatives with migratory and job experiences in certain sectors (Briggs, 2003; Massey, 2008). The youth themselves demonstrated that even though they dream of being their own boss and setting up their own working hours, all of their work experiences have been in the service industry, e.g., landscaping, construction, store clerks, and factory workers. The fact that the youth have used the available resources in the community, i.e., the social networks available to them, in understanding the occupations they could aspire to have has worked to their advantage because it has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the job search (Aguilera & Massey, 2003). In addition, being exposed to a particular employment sector has made them knowledgeable of the steps they must take to eventually yield higher wages within those sectors.

Since the youth have been exposed through family accounts and their own work experiences to the abuses they might encounter at the work place as unauthorized immigrants, their possibilities have become more realistic. While some are clearly disillusioned that they may not be able to reach their dreams of having a four-year college education in the United States, they are still hoping to succeed in the areas they have chosen. Consequently, having the freedom to make their own occupational choices is an essential component of why these youth want to pursue a higher education.

Although better employment opportunities such as the ability to leave a job for a better one and having reasonable working conditions such as decent working hours and a respectful and acceptable working environment are imperative for the youth, making more money than their parents is an essentially important point as well. All of the occupations they have selected show their drive to achieve more occupational mobility and a higher socioeconomic status than their

parents have. As such, better employment opportunities and conditions do not precede and/or supersede the importance of salary but are both equally important in their eyes.

### **Being recognized and respected within the family structure**

The youth also aspire to continue their education because they feel that having a career and/or a way to make their own money without depending on an employer will ultimately bring them the respect and admiration of their family, as well as the recognition they feel they deserve for their educational efforts.

The educational aspirations of the youth deeply reflected a need to be recognized and respected by the community around them. Karen, Pedro and Josie all talked about the importance of having a good career so that they can help others and make their parents proud. To exemplify, Pedro explains that his parents brought him to the United States when he was two-years-old because they did not want him to work in the fields; they brought him so that he could get an education and be somebody. Jovani and Ema also shared similar expectations and discussed the ways in which their parents expect them to achieve more education so that they can serve as role models for younger siblings and make them proud.

But parental expectations are not limited to getting more education and better jobs, but it starts at having the youth take on more responsibilities around the household in order to gain more respect and acceptance as valuable and contributing members within the family structure. Having parents that are forced to work long hours to better provide for their families has impacted the youths' occupational choices and at the same time exposed them to increased adult responsibilities, which at the time of their arrival, they were unprepared for. Nevertheless, playing an essential role in the household as part-time caretakers and providers has given the

youth a reason to continue working harder and the motivation to achieve many of their future goals.

To exemplify, Karen points out the ways in which she was made to work “as a maid” to help her father and stepmother with daily household duties, this at the expense of her own life and educational prospects. Ema and Daisy also remember taking care of their smaller siblings because their parents needed to work. All of the youth vividly recall their loss of freedom when they arrived in the United States and some illustrated how they could not even play in the streets and/or make too much noise in their apartments (Daisy, Ema, Karen and Gus).

The fact that all of the female youth were expected to cook, clean and babysit for smaller siblings during their first years in the United States is consistent with the maintenance of traditional women roles in the household. Another important fact that reflects the preservation of these roles within the household is that four out of the five female participants that were interviewed already have one child of their own (Dodson, 1998). In keeping with traditional gender expectations, most of these young women have chosen to lengthen their time as caretakers and by default to maintain traditional women roles by becoming mothers before their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. This fact is a source of great pride for these young women as they are now in equal footing with their parents and feel that because they have their own children only now can they fully understand their parents’ sacrifices for them —and this has compelled them to pursue their aspirations. Their young children have served as further motivation to reach their goals and not as a barrier.

The male youth also have deep desire of being recognized and respected within the family structure and have felt the pressure of helping their families but in slightly different ways. For instance, Jovani describes his belief that it would be wrong for him to just go to school when

his parents are working so hard and to “do nothing like a pretty boy.” All of the young males that were interviewed have maintained part-time jobs during the time they have been in school to help their families financially and to save up money for their future educational aspirations. As a whole, the entire group of youth experienced a heightened sense of emotional and financial responsibility towards the nuclear family at the time they arrived in the United States and began to see how hard their parents were working to support them.

But being recognized and respected is not only centered around the family structure, but in their conversations it was extended to being acknowledged as human beings that have unique skills to offer and to furthermore be respected as citizens and not continuously branded as undocumented. For instance, Ema, Dai and Pedro, all said that they did not fully belong in the United States. Ema and Pedro both used the same example to illustrate how they felt: “If I die here they can’t even bury me here (Ema)” and “When I die I want to be buried there (Pedro)”. All of the youth felt a deep connection to their homelands and reiterated that back in Mexico they would not experience discrimination for looking different and/or for not speaking English (Daisy and Josie).

Of the ten youth, eight spoke in detail about the possibility of going back to their homelands to complete their careers where they would have more occupational choices. Many of them felt that being Mexican citizens they had a right to obtain a higher education in their countries and that their efforts would be better acknowledged and utilized in their homelands. For instance, Daisy explained that her “inability to speak English perfectly” would not be a deterrent to get an advanced degree in her homeland. She feels that having an accent would brand her as different in a college campus in the United States.

The recognition the youth crave also extends to their need to be treated just like any other immigrant. In discussing their undocumented status and the impact of it in their educational aspirations, all of the youth explained that it is difficult for them to achieve a higher education in the United States because even after they have a college degree this accomplishment is not adequately recognized because they are undocumented. In other words, the youth demonstrated a sincere concern for not being able to translate their academic achievements into real monetary success in the United States.

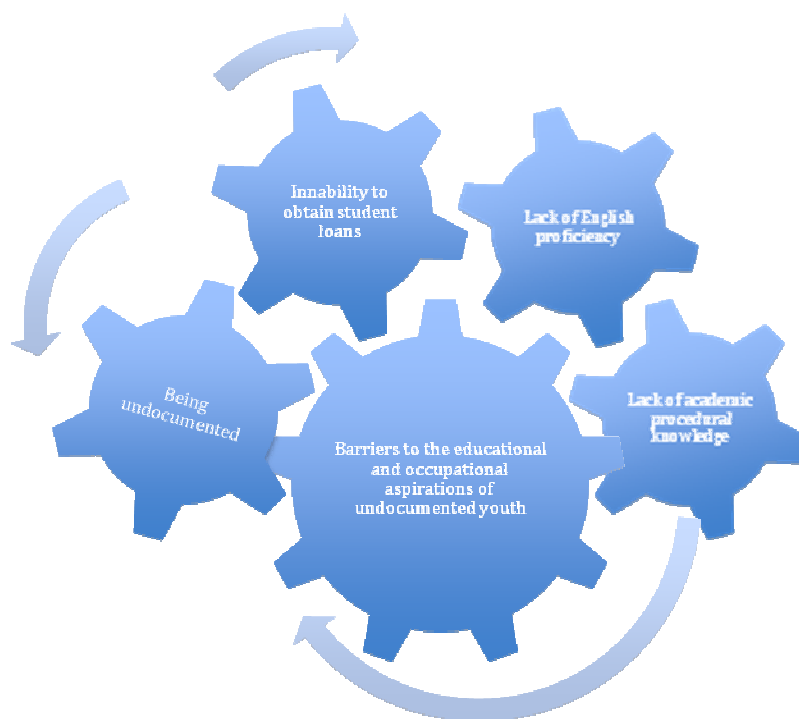
## **Research Question 2**

### **What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals?**

While discussing their educational aspirations, all of the participants referred to the fact that their undocumented status has had a moderating and/or limiting influence in the educational goals they now look to achieve. In addition to the fact that being undocumented represents a barrier in the aspirations they want to attain, the participants also identified their socioeconomic status and their lack of English fluency as major roadblocks. Moreover, a limited knowledge of the educational requirements they need to reach their educational aspirations was also identified as a major obstacle in realistically planning and realizing their future goals. All of these factors act as interrelated barriers in the youths' lives (Figure 3).

In terms of the barriers to their occupational aspirations, most of the youth linked their future educational plans to the possibility of furthering their opportunities for better employment. In other words, the participants detailed the ways in which their academic pursuits were intrinsically connected to a future job. These youth showed a keen awareness of the difficulties they may encounter in the job market and as a result want to make themselves marketable in specific areas. The youth have identified areas that they would like to go into by making

reference to a network of family and friends that have been successful in working in those areas. As a whole, a major barrier in the acquisition of their occupational goals was their immigration status and their inability to fight for decent wages and better working conditions. This prevents the youths from pursuing new career paths and causes them to stay with those they are familiar with and that are easy for them to obtain.




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Figure 3: Educational Barriers to Being Undocumented

## **Educational Barriers**

### **Being undocumented**

Being undocumented represents a clear barrier in the youths' ability to pursue their educational dreams. The fact that they are undocumented has made them change their original

educational dreams and opt for options they perceive to be more realistic and practical within their immigration status. For instance, Jovani talked about the fact that he had originally intended to become a medical doctor, but that since the opportunities to pursue this kind of degree for someone like him are limited, his only real option is to go to a vocational school, “to have a short career.” Ema also explained how she desired to go to college, but since she does not have any papers, this would be impossible. Daisy would have liked to become a teacher, but she does not think this is within her reach now. Dai and Jonas also said that being unauthorized it does not make sense for them to attend a four-year college.

Being unauthorized in the land of opportunity has influenced and changed the educational aspirations of all the youth. Their experiences crossing the border; their knowledge of their parents’ sacrifices in bringing them to the States; their own difficulties learning English and adapting to a new culture; and their witness to their parents’ and friends’ experiences encountering the many occupational barriers that undocumented people face in the United States have taught them that to succeed in the States they need to be flexible and adapt to the conditions their status leaves them.

These eclectic experiences have also given the youth an understanding of the consequences of their unauthorized status and this knowledge has taught them that they must be realistic in terms of their educational aspirations. For example, the youth are keenly aware that being undocumented they are susceptible to deportation laws and want to restrict any possibility of being detained by immigration officials. The youth feel that by working in big factories with other unauthorized immigrants they are more vulnerable to random immigration raids. As a result, the youth aspire to advance their education, hoping to obtain jobs other than factory work.

Being undocumented the youth have learned to evade certain places and to “stay out of trouble” for fear of being deported (Pedro, Josie, Jonas, Ema and Dai). The youth also know that they are not protected by state regulations in the workplace. This knowledge has led most of them to find alternative solutions in vocational schools and by wanting to pursue occupations that are typically outside their ethnic economies such as landscaping, restaurant worker, house cleaning and babysitting (Nee, Sanders, & Sernau, 1994).

The youth consistently agreed that their immigration status was the first impediment in getting a higher education. Jovani, Ema, Daisy, Jonas, Pedro, Dai, Gus, Josie, and Lulu all expressed their concern with the limited opportunities they had in their lives as a result of being unauthorized. However, at the same time the youth have resorted to using any other available opportunities to their advantage in having a more prosperous life. For instance, the youth understand that completing a four-year college education is mostly out of their reach, so they spoke constantly of going to the local community college to learn more English and/or to earn certificates in the areas they wish to work in. Other options mentioned were to go to vocational schools in the areas that do not require proof of legal documentation. While these undocumented youth are aware of the serious barrier that their immigration status represents, they are willing to try to obtain a higher education, hoping to be given the opportunity to work in their fields of expertise. Many of the youth (Dai, Jovani, Jonas, Pedro, Gus and Lulu) have educational aspirations that specifically match the restrictions they face in getting employment. Becoming a beautician, an electrician, a construction worker, a daycare and metallurgic worker all encompass fields that other undocumented immigrants have already made inroads in and that also provide a certain level of occupational freedom.

### **Inability to obtain student loans**

Having access to an affordable college education may lead high school graduates to go on to college, and perhaps even encourage those who may have dropped out of high school not to drop out and to be resilient (Chin, & Juhn, 2010). Several studies have reached a similar conclusion in regard to the importance of financial aid and college completion rates, i.e., that the affordability of college education has a great impact on students' attendance and on the numbers of college years they are able to complete (Chin, & Juhn, 2010; Dynarski, 2003; 2005; Kane, 1994). Following the findings of previous research, the undocumented youth all expressed their frustration at not being able to comfortably afford a college education. All of them were aware that as undocumented immigrants in the state of New Jersey they would not be able to obtain student loans. Karen specifically pointed out that she knew that a college education would be very expensive and that this was the most serious barrier that she faced in wanting to be a pediatrician. Thus, another obstacle the youth identified which is linked to their immigration status is their inability to get college loans.

Pedro detailed his dilemma in going to a four-year school by explaining that going to college was a very expensive endeavor and that someone in his condition would most likely not be eligible for financial aid. Ema also said that even if she applied for scholarships, she would not get them because she doesn't have a social security number. Daisy and Josie specifically refer to the fact that they can't get student loans as a major barrier in their ability to pursue their dreams.

Undocumented youth face a myriad of problems in trying to pay for a college education because in most states they do not qualify for state or federal aid. Additionally, many scholarship organizations require applicants to submit proof of their legal status in order to even

be considered. Still, even if the undocumented student is able to get some scholarship money, this money is never enough to cover all college-related expenses, e.g., books, clothing, food, transportation, etc., leaving the youth alone to secure the necessary funds.

Overall, the youth felt that if they could get student loans they would be more motivated to pursue a four-year college degree. One of the greatest fears in terms of enrolling in a four-year college is the real possibility of not being able to finish the degree because of their inability to pay. The youth expressed that obtaining a higher education is most of all a monetary investment in their futures. Therefore, if there is the slightest possibility of this investment not being realized for financial reasons, then the youth would rather find other, more realistic alternatives. In the case of these youths, their options are limited to attending a vocational school and/or getting an apprenticeship.

### **Lack of English proficiency**

All of the youth, except Pedro who has been living in the U.S. for 16 years, highlighted the fact that their lack of English proficiency was a severe barrier in the achievement of both their educational and occupational goals. While the youth feel that as undocumented persons they are being denied access to many opportunities, another tangible hurdle they must overcome is their inability to speak English with ease. The youth showed a clear understanding that American citizens expect those who live in their country to speak English. Consequently, the youth believe that not being able to speak English perfectly is a great source of discrimination toward them because this makes them feel “different” in the way they relate and communicate with others.

To illustrate, Jovani asserted that what “makes us different is that we don’t speak English.” Following this line of thinking Gus also explained that undocumented immigrants are

even more vulnerable to abuses because most do not speak English, and people exploit them even more because of their ignorance. The youth explained that this abuse stems from their linguistic inability to ask the right questions and to affirm their rights not only out of fear but also because people withhold information, thinking they do not understand.

Not being able to fluently speak English has been a source of great anxiety and has been emotionally draining for the youth. For Karen, Ema, Daisy and Dai, their inability to communicate with others in English translated into depressive episodes, which led some to drop out (Karen and Dai) and the school performance of others to suffer (Jovani, Ema, Daisy, and Josie). For instance, Karen detailed: “At first it was really hard for me because I could not understand English [...] I became very sad and disillusion about everything.” Ema shared this opinion when she narrated that: “I didn’t want to go to school because I didn’t know how I was going to communicate with people.” Daisy also spoke of the fact that when she entered school, she was nervous all the time because she did not know how she was going to communicate in English. Dai also said that not being able to speak English made her feel like a total stranger. Moreover, Gus explained that being in school he felt “nervous because [he] knew [he] had a lot of work ahead of [him...]” “I did not know any English, and I felt bad about this.” Similarly, Josie felt that without being able to speak English fluently, he was more vulnerable to abuses and has consequently worked very hard to assimilate into the American mainstream by learning more English.

Not being able to fluently speak English puts the youth at a severe disadvantage. The youth have already experienced the debilitating effects of this by seeing how their parents have to rely on them and other people as personal translators when they are in need of any community services. This makes them dependent on others and puts them in a weak position to defend

themselves against abuses. The youth also understand that by not speaking English fluently, they will make less money and work in less prestigious jobs. Therefore, these young adults understand that even if they are accepted into a college or vocational school, this alone would not give them the chance to earn a decent income; they must be able to communicate in English or they will not be able to compete for the jobs they want.

At this point, the youth believe that if they want to succeed in the U.S., as long-time residents they need to be able to communicate with neighbors; and to get a good job, they need to speak English fluently—if they do not, they are at a severe disadvantage. Thus their educational, occupational aspirations, and quality of life depend on it, and most are willing and indeed plan to continue studying English as part of their future goals.

### **Lack of academic procedural knowledge**

During the interviews, the youth clearly delineated that their undocumented status has had an impact on their educational aspirations, as well as a negative effect in their inability to secure student loans. However, throughout the conversations the youth were not able to clearly pinpoint any other barriers, such as their lack of academic preparation to be able to succeed in post-secondary education. None of the youth discussed any course pre-requisites they would need in order to enroll and/or to achieve their degrees/certificates. The youth also did not know what steps they needed to take to complete a college application and/or how much money they would need to accomplish their educational goals. The youth were not aware of exactly which schools they wanted to attend and/or what schools would be the best options for them in terms of their migratory and financial constraints. Only one of them (Pedro) was able to narrow down his choices to two schools, Rutgers and William Paterson University. Overall, they all discussed the college application process in terms of third party knowledge given to them outside of an

educational setting, i.e., what they have heard from others in the neighborhood and/or friends, not their guidance counselors and/or teachers. In none of the cases, the youth had yet attempted to apply for post-secondary enrollment although two of them had attained their high school degrees two years prior to the interview and seven had recently completed them (Table 5.1).

To illustrate, Jovani said that he was going to get the information about the school he wanted to go to from a co-worker in the metallurgic factory where he works. He explained that getting his certificate would cost him approximately \$8,000.00 because that is the going rate in other similar schools. Karen was unable to give any details and/or to mention by name the universities she plans to attend, and she could not articulate any of the pre-requisites that she would need to enroll in a pre-med program. Pedro also said that he did not know how to apply to college for business administration, but that he knew that he did not want end-up like his parents. In addition, those that have seriously considered the possibility of going back to Mexico to realize their educational and occupational aspirations, do not have any knowledge about college requirements and/or the college application process in Mexico (Daisy, Josie and Ema). They believe that being Mexican citizens they have an innate right to be accepted into a college and to pursue a post-secondary education in their country.

Based on their responses, the youth displayed a set of deeply ingrained ideological beliefs and ideas about the importance of education in their lives. However, more concrete knowledge and attitudes about what it would take to actually attain these aspirations do not exactly inform their future expectations. For instance, it is clear that Karen, Pedro and Josie have a desire to pursue lengthy post-secondary careers, i.e., beyond a four-year college degree. In spite of this, at this point they clearly lack the basic realization that only wishes and hard work will not get them accepted into the colleges and careers they want. They must also learn to successfully navigate

the competitive waters of the college application process and be academically prepared for the challenges ahead. While these are the same challenges that most youths face in the inner cities, the fact that they are undocumented further curbs their ability to go out comfortably and seek out this information. This fact coupled with the lack of knowledge about the educational resources that may be available to them in their communities, and the lack of educational capital within their social networks and family structures, severely constrains their likelihood of achieving their educational aspirations.

Nevertheless, while the youth clearly lack the procedural knowledge to delineate a path to achieve their academic aspirations, their resilience and disposition to achieve more education than their parents is still mostly pragmatic when taking into account the descriptions of their aspirations and how they plan to achieve them. Therefore, the fact that undocumented youth, in spite of their illegal status, remain determined about their dreams of acquiring a higher education speaks to their resilience in the face of insurmountable barriers.

The youth repeatedly stated that they would be able to reach their goals if they worked hard. Such positivism in terms of their future goals could be explained by the same lack of knowledge about the professions they would like to follow and of the future implications of their undocumented status. In other words, some of the youth may simply not know enough about the jobs they want to pursue and may have expectations which do not necessarily match what in reality they will be able to accomplish. To illustrate, Josie realistically expects to transfer his accounting degree from Mexico to a successful practice in the United States without discussing the fact that taxing and accounting laws in Mexico are different than those in the United States, and therefore, may not be completely transferrable. Ema also expects to find an internship as an interior designer, and while she foresees some financial problems in getting her education and

says that being undocumented is a barrier to obtaining a higher education, she does not see her immigration status as a problem in obtaining an internship and subsequent employment in the field of interior design.

Consequently, a major barrier in the youth's acquisition of their aspirations is their limited knowledge about the college application process and major pre-requisites. Having more information about these facts can better prepare them to face the challenges ahead. At this point, these youth are unprepared to complete a college application because they have not had the right parental and school mentoring to guide them through this process more successfully. Given the fact that these youth are also facing an undocumented status and severe financial restraints, the likelihood that they would successfully enroll and complete the education they want is seriously diminished by the obstacles ahead (Abrego, 2006; Contreras, 2009).

## **Occupational barriers**

### **Knowledge of the future implications of being undocumented**

The difficulties in being undocumented are not limited to getting an education; these barriers extend to being able to get a job not only in the area of expertise but in any relatively high paying job. Additional difficulties take place when undocumented youth realize that higher paying jobs require a legal documented status and that they are restricted in their realistic choice of an occupation. Many undocumented youth believe that a college education would allow them to level the playing field and subsequently be able to get better paying jobs. Unfortunately, at the time of graduation, most realize that unless their immigration status is adjusted to reflect a legal status, the same barrier will prevail throughout their employment lives.

Of the youth that participated in the interviews, few were able to express that being undocumented was also a hurdle in obtaining the job they wanted. Of those that did, Jonas

talked about being undocumented as an employment barrier: “Not a lot of companies are going to hire me because even though I have the certificate, I don’t have a Social Security number.” In this statement, Jonas demonstrates that he knows that getting an electrician’s certificate is not a guarantee that he would be able to find a job in that area. Ema also refers to the dichotomy of getting a college degree and not being able to “do anything with it,” referring to the fact that even if she succeeds in obtaining a college degree, she will still be limited in her ability to find employment. However, most of the youth believe that once they obtain their certificates and/or degrees, they will have the edge to obtain the jobs they desire.

Their confidence in finding employment has been reinforced by the fact that all of them with the exception of Karen have had several different working experiences. For example, Jovani has worked in a metallurgic factory for the past four years, Ema works in a grocery store, Gus works cleaning office buildings, Dai in a clothing store and Josie in a florist. All of them have been able to find employment and to maintain their jobs despite the fact that they are undocumented. As a result, knowing that being undocumented has not been a major impediment in finding employment, the youth feel that this will continue to be the case after they have obtained their post-secondary certificates. In other words, the youth’s work experiences have cemented the thinking that if they are willing to work hard, they can get the job they want.

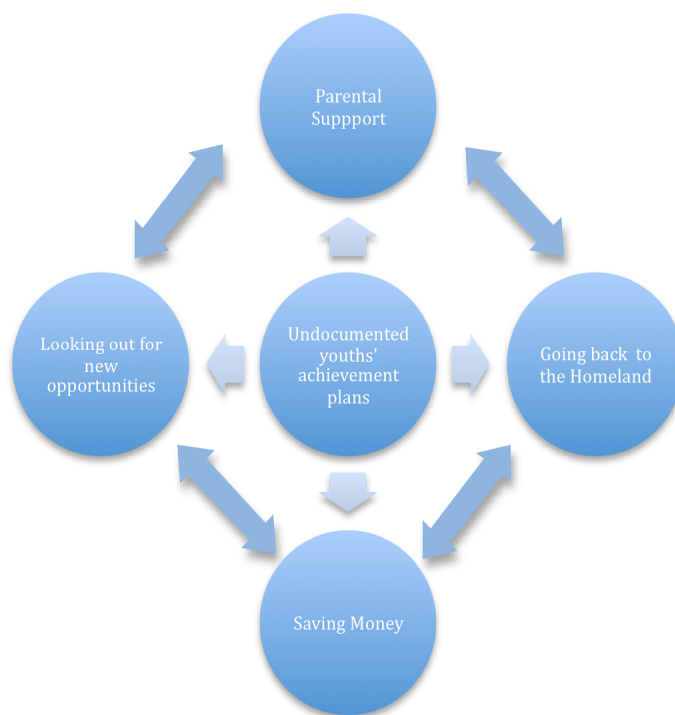
### **Research Question 3**

#### **How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?**

Most of the undocumented youth have clear aspirations about the educational and occupational paths they intend to follow. The range of the educational achievements they expect to attain is wide and ranges from a six-month to a year apprenticeship in a vocational school such as a beauty school, to a two-year training to become an electrician, an accountant and/or an

interior designer, to going to a four-year college to become a businessman and lastly to go to medical school.

While the youth know the paths they would like to follow, their achievement plans were many times vague and haphazardly explained through third-person accounts of what was needed to apply to different schools and the ingrained idea that their educational and job aspirations are relatively easy to achieve if they just work hard enough. As previously explained, the youth did not make clear the nature and amount of college course work that is required to achieve their educational goals. The youth also did not explain in concrete terms what would be required for them to apply to any of the schools they wanted to attend; instead they only focused on the financial aspect as the main impediment. Nevertheless, the youth did describe in general terms the various ways in which they plan to achieve their aspirations: first, by relying on parental support; second, by saving money to cover education expenses; third, by going back to their homeland; and finally, by looking out for new opportunities and keeping hope alive (Figure 4).




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Figure 4: Achievement Plans of Undocumented Youth

### **Parental Support**

Through research it is known that youths' educational goals and achievement paths are influenced by many people, processes and institutions (Behnke et al., 2004; Clayton, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Plunkett & Bacama-Gomez, 2003; Qian & Blair, 1999; Teachman & Paasch, 1998; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Parents, the broader family, the influence of peer groups, the community, the schools and others are all drawn in to shape youths' progress towards their self-fulfillment. However, the youths themselves also play a pivotal role in forming and reforming their behavior, aspirations and achievements based on the possibilities within their reach. In this study, the youth refer to their parents as a main source of motivation and of financial and emotional support to achieve their goals.

The youth spoke candidly about the sacrifices their parents had made to cross the border, and as a result, they feel indebted to stay out of trouble and to continue their education and “be somebody.” For instance, Daisy talked about the fact that “when you are that young, you don’t understand what your parents are saying, you can’t really comprehend what they mean.” Dai explained that “I did not think I was getting more opportunities here, but in time I was able to change my mind. I was just blocked.” And in talking about what it means to live in America, Jovani described a deep sense of responsibility towards his parents’ sacrifices when he mentioned how careful he is not to get in trouble because if he did, “Why did I come here? To waste my life?” Pedro also describes the ways in which his parents have put a lot of trust in him to “get ahead in life.” None of the youth talked about living independently from their parents; on the contrary, they expressed a wish to stay with their parents so that with their support they may be able to advance their studies.

For undocumented youth, continued parental support after they graduate high school is an essential tool to combat their inability to obtain student loans. To illustrate, for Karen, Josie, Ema, Dai and Gus having full parental support will allow them to focus exclusively on their studies without having to work to support themselves. However, it is interesting to note that of the males and females that were interviewed, the females spoke more openly and in greater detail about being financially supported by their mothers as they go to school. The young males, on the other hand, did not talk about parental support in such determinant ways, but instead referred to the fact that without some sort of parental support they could not obtain their dreams of a higher education.

In terms of the degree of parental support they would need, all of them, except Gus, spoke about a combination of parental support with their present efforts to save money for their

future college expenses by continuing to work at least part-time while they go to school. The youth have a clear awareness of the struggles their parents face on a daily basis to provide basic sustenance for their families, and as a result, none of them plan on being completely dependent on their parents for their post-secondary studies, but instead plan to continue working to save money. Therefore, the youths' expectations of parental support have been moderated by the knowledge of their families' lower socioeconomic status and their inability to fully pay for their college education (Desforges, & Abouchaar, 2003).

### **Saving money**

Lack of money to support their educational aspirations was a dark cloud over the youth as they talked about their future achievements. In all of the conversations the youth repeatedly asserted their wishes to obtain a higher education, but always reported that this would be very difficult given the fact that they could not obtain student loans. The youth have solved this puzzle in part by saving money before enrolling in post-secondary school and by continuing to work part-time to support their college expenses.

Saving money is an ongoing process that would not end at the time they enroll in post-secondary education as they all plan to work in some capacity to build their savings. However, saving money is also a way for the youth to assert their independence within the family structure, to serve as role models for younger siblings, and a way to relieve their parents of their financial burdens. For instance, Karen and Josie, specifically talked about how expensive college textbooks are and how they need to save up some money to at least cover those expenses and have some spending money. Others such as Jonas, Jovani, Dai and Ema talked about how saving money now to go to a vocational school would alleviate the pressure of not being able to finish their certificates. One of the major fears in terms of achieving their goals was the possibility of

not being able to finish their advanced studies due to lack of funds. Seeing how easily debt can pile up and how this can be a serious barrier in their ability to finish their schooling, the youth have decided to be actively employed now and since they do not have to pay rent and are not forced to pay any bills, they are able to save most of what they make.

### **Going back to their homeland**

In discussing their achievement plans to obtain a post-secondary education, the youths' answers did not focus entirely on parental support and on their responsibility to save money for their future expenses, the youth also talked about the real possibility of going back to their homeland—Mexico. Of the ten youth, eight talked about the possibility of returning to Mexico to complete their education. In Mexico, the youth feel that they would be given the right to enroll in college and that it would be much easier for them to pay for this education. For instance, Josie detailed his plan to attend a community college in the States, but later he plans to finish his career in a four-year college in Mexico, where it is more feasible for him to pay for it. Other youth such as Ema, Jonas and Daisy dream of going back to Mexico to finish their studies but also talked about the fact that criminal activity has increased so much in their birthplaces that they are afraid of going back.

Overall, the option of going back to Mexico is for many of the youth a vague possibility because none of them were able to clearly delineate where they would live and how they would adapt to the new living conditions. The youth also expressed some ambivalence as to what they might find in their native towns after being away for so long. However, knowing that they can go back to Mexico seems a comforting thought in light of the likelihood that they may not given the job they want in the States once they finish their post-secondary studies. To illustrate, Ema, Daisy and Jonas discussed the ways in which obtaining a higher education in the States is almost

a useless endeavor for them because “what would I do with a college degree if I don’t have papers?” (Ema) and “even if I did get it [a college degree] here, it would be useless, what would be the point? I would not be able to use it?” (Daisy) and “I can be prepared to do anything but they [immigration authorities] won’t let you really get a [high paying] job” (Jonas).

Therefore, the thought of going back to Mexico is used as another alternative to achieve their educational plans. However, their wish of going back also reveals the ways in which the youth feel alienated and powerless to control their own futures. The youth talked about the fact that being Mexican citizens they had an intrinsic right to obtain an education and that this right would not be taken away from them in their native countries. On the contrary, going to college in the States they feel that they may be rejected for their condition of illegality, and even once they enroll, they may suffer discrimination at the hands of people that see them as different.

Being different in terms of their language abilities was another reason the youth considered going back to Mexico. For example, Jovani, Daisy, Dai talked about the ways in which not being native speakers of English has caused them great anguish, and it continues to be another reason they feel different. “Sometimes I do feel less than other people because I don’t speak English” (Jovani). Daisy feels that being a Mexican citizen she has more rights in her country to go to college. Daisy senses that in Mexico she won’t be rejected by her differences and by her inability to “speak English perfectly.” Therefore, in thinking of going back to their homelands to continue their education the youth are motivated by a feeling that they won’t have to face linguistic discrimination and that this would make it easier for them to achieve their educational dreams.

### **Looking out for new opportunities and keeping hope alive**

In discussing the ways in which they would achieve their educational aspirations, the youth also talked about the fact that they need to wait and see what happens with their immigration status. The youth seemed hopeful that their immigration status might change sometime in the near future and this would help them reach their goals. In their conversations, the youth demonstrated a strong sense of hope and resilience about their futures. For instance, Pedro is positively convinced that he can adjust his immigration status on the basis that he has lived and obtained all of his education in the United States.

Josie is also hopeful and resilient about his future goals and his ability to one day become a legal resident of the United States. Josie explained how he has turned many negative experiences into incentives to continue pushing harder in his life. Josie plans to obtain part of his post-secondary education in the States and then go back to Mexico to finish his career and in doing so be able to obtain a student visa to come back to the United States as a legal immigrant. Yet, keeping hope and resilience alive are not only limited to the youths' dreams of one day becoming legal residents, it is also in their belief that after they obtain the post-secondary education they have planned for that they will be able to find employment in those areas.

All of the youth showed extreme confidence in their ability to find employment in their areas of expertise, notwithstanding their unauthorized status. For instance, Jovani plans to obtain a job that would pay him at least \$20.00 dollars and hour, Karen plans to practice medicine, Ema plans to obtain an internship as an interior designer, Dai plans to find a job in a salon as a beautician, Jonas and Pedro plan to have their own businesses.

While all of the youth want to realistically find occupations within their areas of expertise following their acquisition of degrees and/or certificates, they also understand the possibility that

they may have to adapt to any changing conditions that may arise as a result of their undocumented status. The youth understand that as undocumented immigrants their futures are uncertain and that the threat of deportation is a daily reality for them (Jovani, Jonas and Dai). As a result, most of their educational aspirations and plans for achievement have been moderated and leveled based on their limiting socioeconomic and immigration status, and while they wish to achieve their dreams, there is also a sense of great flexibility and recognition that these plans may not be accomplished, yet they still hope that everything will work out.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

At this point in their lives, the youth are hopeful and highly motivated to achieve all of their dreams. Given the educational, occupational, economic and socio-structural challenges that most unauthorized youth experience and which await them after high school graduation, the resilience they show in combination with their high level of motivation can help in understanding how these youth plan to succeed despite the harsh circumstances they face. Most of the youth have adapted their dreams to face many personal and social barriers. Hence, it is important to reflect on the youths' aspirations not as unrealistic dreams but as an overall resilience and drive to have a life better than that of their parents despite the fact that they face a severely restrictive legislative system and that many would not be able to adjust their undocumented status.

This chapter is organized into three main parts. First a summary of the results from this study is presented. Second, the major conclusions that emanated from the youths' answers are presented. Third, recommendations for further research are explored and policy implementations are made in light of the barriers undocumented youth face in getting a higher education.

#### **Summary of findings**

The main purpose of this study was to uncover, examine and try to understand the educational and occupational aspirations of a group of undocumented Mexican youth. An additional goal of this study was to quantitatively determine how much post-secondary education the undocumented youth wanted to achieve and from these answers conduct qualitative interviews aimed at examining how the youth planned to achieve their educational goals.

Consequently, another major purpose of this research was to have extensive dialogues with the youth which ultimately demonstrated their need and desire to advance their studies in order to have better employment opportunities.

A total of 125 participants, 62 documented and 63 undocumented, took the survey. Of these participants, ten, five males and five females, volunteered to participate in in-depth interviews. During the analysis of the quantitative phase, it was clear that the undocumented youth aspire to acquire a post-secondary education at almost the same rate as the documented youth despite the fact that they are unauthorized, have spent an average of ten years in the States and are not fully proficient in English. The fact that they are undocumented and face serious barriers in accomplishing these dreams did not act as a major barrier in precluding them from having high aspirations.

In the quantitative analysis, the undocumented youth showed a tendency to select jobs that required less education than they had originally reported they would like to attain. This demonstrated a discrepancy between the level of education they would like to complete and the jobs they realistically know they will be able to find. In their answers to the survey, they demonstrated great positivism in that a high number reported that they wanted to obtain Master's degrees and realistically think that they will be able to obtain employment within those areas. Interestingly enough, at the same time, undocumented youth also selected to go into manual labor occupations at higher rates than documented youth.

Both in the quantitative and qualitative data the undocumented youth demonstrated many similarities in terms of their educational and occupational aspirations. Consistently, undocumented youth want to achieve more than their parents, both in terms of education and occupation. Therefore, showing that despite their parents' low level of cultural and educational

capital and having mostly blue-collar jobs, the youth are clearly encouraged to move beyond their parents' level of socioeconomic achievement, and most have already progressed beyond the educational achievement of their parents' generation (Table 5.1).

Consistent with the quantitative analysis, the qualitative data also showed that the undocumented youth are highly confident in their belief that having a higher education would eventually lead them to obtain the jobs they want. They believe this despite the structural barriers they face. Time and time again during the interviews the youth explained the importance of education in their lives and asserted the fact that they want to have jobs where they are respected and where they can make enough money to support their own families. In the interviews, the youth demonstrated an awareness of how their condition of illegality might prevent them from reaching their goals, and while this is a source of great distress, confusion and uncertainty, they still continue to persevere in looking for any educational and employment opportunities available to them.

In trying to understand the full impact of their unauthorized status in their lives, it is clear that being undocumented is a relentless negative force in their lives. Due to the fact that they are undocumented, the youth have given up most of their original aspirations of going to a four-year college, and instead have decided to settle for going to a vocational school and/or a community college where they can complete an apprenticeship —quickly and inexpensively. The information from the interviews clarified and put into perspective the results in the quantitative data which showed a high rate of undocumented youth who wanted to obtain a four year college education and beyond.

Being undocumented has not only affected their overall aspirational outlook but has also contributed to their sense that they are second-class citizens and that in some ways that they are

living on “borrowed time.” The youth constantly expressed the ways in which they have to navigate the possibility of being deported, and while this has caused many of them to stay out of trouble, at the same time, it has prevented them from freely asking questions about the educational opportunities that may be available to them. In other words, the fear that their undocumented status might be revealed is also the reason why many of them do not have accurate and sufficient information about the careers they would like to pursue. This information also clarified the finding in the quantitative data which reported that a high number of undocumented youth realistically thought they could obtain a professional job if they had the right credentials.

Clearly, being undocumented sets the stage for many of the youth to have unrealistic expectations based on three important facts. First, they do not know exactly where to get the information they need. Second, fear of deportation prevents them from getting information about educational opportunities that may be available to them, and third, because of this lack of educational capital, they lack a clear connection between academic credentials, possible jobs, and their immigration status.

While the youth may lack information about educational opportunities, they are very much aware of their condition of illegality and the major restrictions they face, yet they are still grateful for the opportunity to live in the United States. The youth did not express bitterness about their present lives and/or about how their lives would have been if they stayed in Mexico. Instead, their altruism and gratitude towards their parents’ sacrifices is demonstrated in their willingness to work hard and to make the best out the situation they are faced with. Given the harsh conditions they encountered when they first entered the States, the youth have adapted to their new lives in a very short time and are now active contributors to the basic sustenance of

their parents' households and their own. Knowing that they have reached this level of independence makes them feel proud of their accomplishments to date and motivates them to continue down the path to success, even if this success is not measured by acquiring a college and/or a Master's degree but instead by their ability to comfortably and safely support their own families and provide their children with even more opportunities.

Throughout the interviews the youth exhibited constant resilience —resilience based on the powerful stories of motivation, hard work, and persistence generated through their narratives. This type of resilience cannot be measured by standardized tests and/or GPAs but is one that is bound within a person's life, that which extends beyond the boundaries of any measurement. In this sense, undocumented youths' stories of educational and occupational aspirations must be considered as a way to resist and persevere in the face of the oppressive structures they face.

## **Conclusion**

It has become clear that providing a basic public education is no longer enough for undocumented youths because it is not adequately preparing them to be competitive members of our global village. A basic public education is no longer sufficient for undocumented youths because in this outsourcing and technologically driven economy, obtaining just a basic public education does not prepare youth to be competitive members of society. Recent economic changes have ushered in a wave of educational reforms in which public "education has become increasingly more technical and instrumental, with a primary focus on the economic outcomes of education, and undergirded by a resolute belief in meritocracy" (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. 2). As these changes occur, undocumented youth are persistently kept on the sidelines of the educational and immigration debates and the country loses the academic and human potential of

thousands of motivated human beings eager to contribute and move up the educational and economic ladders.

The starting point of analysis for undocumented youths' present condition at both the elementary and post-secondary levels has been one-sided when it should be two-sided. First, the discussion has mostly centered on providing undocumented youth with the right to obtain a basic public education. In regards to the rights of undocumented youths to obtain a post-secondary education, this is now addressed on a state-by-state level with some states (Washington, Connecticut, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, California, Texas, New Mexico, and New York), having passed laws allowing them to attend public universities and pay in-state tuition. But, while small battles have been won, these do not negate the call for a national innovative and inclusive policy geared towards developing the educational and professional potential of undocumented youth: "An effort which should focus on removing the legal/illegal impasse which affects a multitude of undocumented children" (Hiscott, 2005, p. 4).

Second, efforts to address the needs of undocumented immigrant youth are incomplete because they often assert their right to obtain an education without making any reference to whether the right to obtain an education is eventually leading them to obtaining better paying jobs. As Justice Brennan highlighted in the majority opinion in *Plyler v. Doe*, an undocumented status "imposes a lifetime of hardship on a discrete class of children not accountable for their disabling status." Evidently, continuing to refuse to provide a pathway out of their condition of illegality, "we deny [undocumented youth] the ability to live within the structure of civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation" (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

While undocumented young adults are, in some circumstances, “allowed” to continue their education in universities and/or vocational schools, they are still not permitted to legally find employment that would pay them a salary equivalent to the credentials and the education they have earned. Therefore, ignoring the fact that education for *all* students, including undocumented youth, extends beyond the realm of public education, and that it is not only how much one knows but how much one is able to use this knowledge in the markets of society, seriously overlooks that undocumented youth also need the legal and practical tools to achieve their professional dreams.

This study develop an awareness of the disabling effects of *undocumentedness* that are based on the youth’s accounts and resilience in the face of oppressive, discriminatory, and social-structural barriers. This study has presented some of the many educational, occupational aspirations and challenges that undocumented youths face. The youth’s narratives highlight the gap between what public schools label “unlimited opportunities for those who work hard” and the realities of life-after-graduation, which undocumented youths must face when they are discarded into a society oblivious to their needs. This study underlines that at the heart of the “undocumented youth problem” there is an isolationist-deficit-process at work in both schools and society.

Drawing on LatCrit theory as a conceptual framework, it is evident that undocumented youth are effectively disempowered and segregated within their communities due to their condition of illegality, and when they attempt to obtain a postsecondary education and/or a high-paying job, their immigration status is used against them as a deficit they cannot overcome. This process begins in schools which by law must ignore undocumented students’ unauthorized status and which offer no real help in advocating for these students’ rights, leaving them helplessly

isolated at the time in which they need the most guidance. These combined experiences transform undocumented youth from everyday students to violators of the law, from stigmatized shadows to criminals undeserving of societal incorporation further marginalizing them into oppressive socioeconomic structures via socio-psychological means of repression.

In this sense, unauthorized youth by default create a new phenomenon, a caste within schools and society, a structure that is perpetuated by the silence of the legislative and executive branches and fueled by society's misconceptions. This system consistently ensures the outsider status of undocumented youth in a hierarchical social structure of haves and have-nots. Resulting in separatist practices and restricting unauthorized youth's lives within their own communities in which they are forced to effectively enter the dominant capitalist low-waged labor market that further positions them as expendable commodities in a life of abuse, fear, and neglect.

It is important to note that the future educational and occupational prospects of undocumented immigrant youths are the future not only of those living in the United States under the stigma of illegality, but of the American population itself. "Given that this population has less access...to the connections, resources, and other forms of social capital that promote" (Crosnoe, & Lopez-Gonzales, 2005, p.3) higher aspirations and faster upward mobility, it is important to draw attention to the perceived and lived experiences of undocumented immigrant youth. This may perhaps be the most compelling way of illustrating the contradictions of contemporary capitalism in an increasingly changing world.

The fact that there are no major policies addressing the status of undocumented youths speaks of a socially constructed, hierarchical, insider/outsider, hegemonized system which fails to appeal to any sense of economic practicality and even morality, to the right of these children

to become full members of society, and to give the human dignity of obtaining their dreams. As it stands, “ways of thinking about [undocumented youth and]...Latino students are routinized through institutional policies and practices...[that are] seen as “common sense” and “normal” and are thus not open to interrogation” much less negotiation (Murrillo, 2002, p. 221).

### **Recommendations for future research**

This present state of affairs calls for further studies that would reaffirm the eclectic nature of undocumented youth’s dreams and resilience to overcome barriers. These studies should be both quantitative and qualitative in nature and use a higher number of participants in order to better demonstrate these youths’ drive to achieve a higher socioeconomic status. Most poignantly, within the youths’ narratives, it is seen that public schools are not providing undocumented youths with the information they need in order to make informed decisions about career paths that are feasible for them. As a result of the lack of guidance and attention that is paid to the needs of undocumented youth in public schools, they are severely neglected by a system that is supposed to give the same educational opportunities to all. Therefore, the role of public schools within the lives of undocumented youths is an area of research that still severely unexplored.

Future research should examine in greater depth the aspirations-achievement paradox of immigrant youth in relation to the aspirations of other undocumented groups, i.e., non-Mexican groups, since different immigrant groups have various needs and methods of obtaining their goals. Given the diverse nature and much needed attention of this population, careful revisions of past studies and more personalized in-depth research should be conducted with undocumented youth in order to substantiate the widely held proposition that there is a connection between

aspirations and achievement and between time-spent in a particular community. The goals of such studies should be to gain a deeper understanding of undocumented youth's condition in secondary and post-secondary education as well as their opportunities within the labor market and the possible impact of policies addressing their needs.

### **Recommendations for future policy**

Today's immigrant population is entering not only a national, but a global economy that is in transition in which labor markets are progressively demanding more educated workers. In light of this, undocumented youth have been on the sidelines of the immigration discussion for far too long and the country has been losing the academic and human potential of thousands of motivated human beings eager to contribute and move up the educational and economic ladder.

The rejection of proposals that could help undocumented immigrant youth ultimately result in the construction and enactment of policies (or the lack of) that are restrictive or that look to "remedy" inadequacies by simply reproducing the local subordination of many immigrant groups (Murrillo, 2002). As a result, the political stillness with regard to unauthorized youth permanently precludes them from the potential of earning higher wages, from exercising their constitutional rights as long-time residents of the country, from taking their rightful place within American society, and eventually utilizing their democratic rights in this capitalist nation.

This study then calls upon policymakers to make changes towards addressing the legal status of undocumented youth while they are still in school, to "catch them early" so that they have a better chance of completing a high school education and attend post-secondary school. The fact that most adults have reached their highest level of educational attainment by the age of 25 should be considered when gauging the economic impact of schooling on undocumented

youths (Fry, 2002; Swanson, 2009, p.12). Given the fact that “at no point in our nation’s recent history...has the critical role of a quality education been more evident...it is also clear that the brunt of the crisis will be borne by those with the least education” (Swanson, 2009, p.30).

At this juncture, it is our collective responsibility to advance a policy that would embrace undocumented youth’s dreams of being fully recognized and of having the same educational and professional opportunities for success afforded to all other youth. Hence, the creation of policies geared towards enhancing “the potential of all our children...should focus on removing hurdles for the disadvantaged, including undocumented children...in regards to their legal status” (Ruge & Izza, 2005, p.4). Given the findings in this study, the following tenets for legislation that would address the needs of undocumented should be kept in mind:

- I. As minors, undocumented youth should be afforded the same rights as any other youth residing in the United States. These rights should not be limited to an elementary and secondary education.
- II. The more time undocumented youth spend in the United States, the more bonds they form with their communities and with American society. It is therefore against the American precepts of liberty, non-discrimination, equity, access, social justice and freedom to expect and/or force these youths to go back to their countries of birth with which they no longer have any ties.
- III. Despite the bleak future they face, undocumented youth attend public schools and most finish their high school education. Many more go on to college, aware of the uphill battle not only to pay for tuition, but also of what the aftermath would bring. This attests to their motivation to achieve high.

IV. Undocumented youth did not willfully and/or knowingly break any federal immigration law. Since they are minors, they must abide by their parents' wishes, and as such, it is unreasonable to punish them for the actions of their parents.

Passing legislation that directly benefits a group of marginalized individuals who are still considered by some as "violators of the law" is not an easy task. While it is true that no one "comes to a policy issue tabula rasa, value-free, uninfluenced by personal experiences and social messages" (Stone, 2001, p.384), it is also true, that the time has come to look not only at the future but how the past has helped to shape present conditions. In light of this, the issue of the legalization of undocumented youth should not be taken by its opponents and supporters as a one-size-fits-all solution of exclusion and/or inclusion and therefore a matter of exclusively restrictive and/or protective measures.

If we are truly part of a global village where equity, freedom and fraternity are truly valued, then we must encourage policymakers to stop ignoring the needs of undocumented youth by condemning them to the life-long punishment of not belonging and of not having one's worth ever recognized by society. In the end, it is only right/just for American society to recognize the inherent value in permitting undocumented youth to "normalize" their immigration status; the reasons should not only be pragmatic, but should also take into account American's precepts of equity, civil rights and humanitarian aid in a democratic society.

APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Research Matrix

Central Question: How do undocumented Mexican youth aged 17-21 express their educational and occupational aspirations in comparison to documented youth, and how do they narrate their plans for the future?

Research Questions	Source of Data Collection	Method of Data Analysis
1. How are the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant undocumented and documented youth different from and/or similar to each other?	Educational and Occupation Aspirations survey	Descriptive, inferential statistics (ANOVAs), correlations (SPSS package)
2. What are undocumented youth's educational and occupational aspirations?	Educational and Occupation Aspirations survey	Descriptive, inferential statistics (ANOVAs), correlations (SPSS package)
3. What are the effects of time-lived in the United States, gender, and immigration status on the educational aspirations of undocumented and documented youth?	Educational and Occupation Aspirations survey	Descriptive, inferential statistics (ANOVAs), correlations (SPSS package)
4. Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school?	First and second semi-structured interviews (Appendices C and D); Researcher's memos: Literal, interpretative and reflexive	1. Transcribed interviews. 2. Codified answers by common themes. 3. Interpreted the meaning of themes/descriptions. 4. Member checks and peer reviews conducted.
5. What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals?	First and second semi-structured interviews (Appendices C and D); Researcher's memos: Literal, interpretative and reflexive	1. Transcribed interviews. 2. Codified answers by common themes. 3. Interpreted the meaning of themes/descriptions. 4. Member checks and peer

		reviews conducted.
6. How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?	First and second semi-structured interviews (Appendices C and D); Researcher's memos: Literal, interpretative and reflexive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transcribed interviews.</li> <li>2. Codified answers by common themes.</li> <li>3. Interpreted the meaning of themes/descriptions.</li> <li>4. Member checks and peer reviews conducted.</li> </ol>

## Appendix B

**Survey of Educational and Occupational Aspirations**

**THIS SURVEY IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS**

**PLEASE, DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON IT**

**THANK YOU**

1. What is your age? Circle the one that applies to you  
*Cual es tu edad? (Circule una)*

17          18          19          20          21

2. What is your grade in school/ What was your final grade in school?  
*Cual es/fue tu último grade escolar?*

9<sup>th</sup>                  10<sup>th</sup>                  11<sup>th</sup>                  12<sup>th</sup>

3. What is the highest grade completed by your mother? (circle one or I don't know)  
*Cual es el grado escolar más alto que terminó tu mamá? (circula uno ó no sé)*

Elementary School/ *Escuela básica*

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8

High School and beyond/ *Escuela secundaria y mas*

9    10    11    12    Some College          **or**    **I don't know/ No sé**

6. What is the highest grade completed by your father? (circle one or I don't know)  
*Cual es el grado escolar más alto que terminó tu papá? (circula uno ó no sé)*

Elementary School/ *Escuela básica*

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8

High School and beyond/ *Escuela secundaria y mas*

9    10    11    12    Some College          **or**    **I don't know/ No sé**

7. What is the occupation of your father \_\_\_\_\_  
*(En que trabaja tu papá)*

8. What is the occupation of your mother \_\_\_\_\_  
*(En que trabaja tu mamá)*

9. Where was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(*En donde nació tu mamá?*)

10. Where was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(*Donde nació tu papá?*)

11. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(*En donde naciste tu?*)

12. How long have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
(*Hace cuanto tiempo vives en los Estados Unidos?*)

13. What were your high school grades?  
(*Selecciona las calificaciones que obtuviste en la secundaria*)

a. Mostly A's,

(*Casi todas fueron A.*)

b. About half A's and half B's,

(*Como la mitad fueron As y la otra mitad Bs.*)

c. Mostly B's,

(*Casi todas fueron Bs.*)

d. About half B's and half C's,

(*Como la mitad fueron Bs y la otra mitad Cs.*)

e. Mostly C's,

(*Casi todos fueron Cs.*)

f. About half C's and half D's,

(*Como la mitad fueron Cs y la otra mitad fueron Ds.*)

g. Mostly D's, and

(*Casi todas fueron Ds y*)

h. Mostly below D.

(*Casi todas fueron debajo de Ds*)

The responses to the following statements are rated on a five-point scale designed to indicate your judgment in terms of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Strongly disagree = 1

Disagree = 2

Undecided (Neither agree or disagree) = 3

Agree = 4

Strongly agree = 5

### I. EDUCATIONAL VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate whether you disagree or agree with each statement presented on the right.	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
1. Everyone needs a high school education today. <i>Hoy en día todos necesitamos una educación secundaria.</i>					
2. You need more education than you now have. <i>Yo necesito mas education de la que tenga ahora.</i>					
3. More education would provide a better living for you. <i>El tener mas educación me dara una oportunidad de mejorar mi vida.</i>					
4. Your parents should have had more education. <i>Mis padres deberian de haber obtenido mas educación de la que tuvieron.</i>					
5. Your parents want you to have more education. <i>Mis padres quieren que yo tenga mas educación.</i>					
6. You plan to continue your education beyond high school. <i>Voy a continuar mi educación despues de la high school.</i>					

## II. SHOLASTIC EXPERIENCES

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate whether you disagree or agree with each statement presented on the right.	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
7. There were/are classes that were/are easy for you. <i>Algunas de las clases que tome en la escuela fueron faciles.</i>					
8. There were/are classes that were/are difficult for you. <i>Algunas de las clases que tome en la escuela fueron dificiles.*</i>					
9. You would describe your interest in classes as good. <i>Me interesa mucho estar en la escuela.</i>					
10. School is/was easy for you. <i>Estudiar es facil para mi.</i>					
11. School is/was difficult for you. <i>Estudiar es dificial para mi.*</i>					
12. You understand/understood what you read for class. <i>Yo entiendo bien lo que leo.</i>					
13. You prefer class work that is challenging so that you can learn new things. <i>Prefiero trabajo academico dificil para así aprender mas cosas.</i>					
14. You like/d school. <i>Me gusta la escuela.</i>					
15. Your attendance is/was regular. <i>Mi asistencia escolar es/era regular.</i>					

## III. LIFE IN THE STATES

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate whether you disagree or agree with each statement presented on the right.	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
16. In the United States it is possible for people from all racial groups to get ahead. <i>En los Estados Unidos es posible que gente de cualquier grupo racial salga adelante.* (70)</i>					
17. Other members of my racial group experience discrimination. <i>Otros miembros de mi grupo racial sufren de discriminación.*(71)</i>					
18. Being Latino(a) you will probably have to work harder than most people in order to get ahead. <i>Siendo Latino(a) probablemente tendré que trabajar más duro que la mayoría de la gente para salir adelante.*(73)</i>					
19. You feel that prejudice and discrimination against others like you impose barriers to their future outcomes? <i>¿Tu crees que el prejuicio y la discriminación en contra de gente como tu impondrá barreras en su futuro?*(74)</i>					
20. Personal advancement in American society is possible for everyone. <i>El avance personal en la sociedad americana (EE.UU.) es posible para todos.*(42)</i>					
21. Being of Mexican descent makes it more difficult for you to get an education. <i>El hecho de ser Mexicano me dificulta mas tener una educacion avanzada.*</i>					
22. Most minority group students in school have a more difficult time getting an education. <i>La mayoría de los estudiantes que son minorias se les dificulta mucho obtener mas educacion.*</i>					

## IV. LIFE PLANS

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate whether you disagree or agree with each statement presented on the right.	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
23. I don't think there are more opportunities to get ahead here than in my country of birth. <i>No pienso que hay más oportunidades para salir adelante aquí en este país, que en mi país natal.*(55)</i>					
24. I would like to return to live in my country of origin. <i>A mí me gustaría volver a vivir a mi país natal.*(56)</i>					
25. I plan to return to my country of origin after I get my education here in the United States because I'll have better opportunities to get ahead over there. <i>Pienso regresar a mi país natal después de que termine mi educación aquí en los Estados Unidos porque tendré mejores oportunidades para salir adelante allá.*(59)</i>					
26. Going back to my country of origin to live is not an option for me. <i>El regresar a vivir en mi país natal verdaderamente no es una opción para mí.*(58)</i>					
* need to be reversed					

## V. OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. What is your current occupation? \_\_\_\_\_  
*En que trabajas en este momento?*

2. Twenty years from now, how much do you think you will personally be earning in today's dollars? (circle one)  
*¿Cuánto dinero crees que ganarás dentro de veinte años? (circula uno)\*(49)*

No more than to \$10/hour  
*No más de \$10/ hora*

\$10-\$15/hour  
*\$10-\$15/ hora*

\$15-\$20/hour  
*\$15-\$20/ hora*

\$20-\$25/hour  
*\$20-\$25/ hora*

\$25-\$30/hour  
*\$25-\$30/ hora*

\$30-\$35/hour  
*\$30-\$35/ hora*

\$35-\$40/hour  
*\$35-\$40/ hora*

\$40-\$45/hour  
*\$40-\$45/ hora*

\$45-\$50/hour  
*\$45-\$50/ hora*

\$50-\$55/hour  
*\$50-\$55/ hora*

More than \$55/hour  
*Más de \$55/ hora*

3. Twenty years from now, what will your socio-economic status be? (circle one)  
*Dentro de veinte años, ¿cuál será tu nivel socio-económico? (circula uno)\*(50)*

1. Poor (*pobre*)
2. Working Class (*de clase obrera*)
3. Middle Class (*de clase media*)
4. Upper Middle Class (*de clase media superior*)
5. Upper Class (*Clase alta*)

4. What jobs or occupations have you thought about going into?  
*¿Que tipo de trabajo/empleo has pensado en desempeñar?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Of the jobs above which one do you think you will realistically follow?

*¿De las trabajos/empleos que escribiste arriba cual crees que es el que realmente vas a seguir?*

---

6. How well do you know the job or occupation you want to follow?

*¿Que tan bien conoces la carrera o el trabajo que quieres seguir?*

You know it well

*La conoces bien*

You have a general knowledge

*Tienes una idea en general*

You do not know much about it

*No sabes mucho acerca de el trabajo*

7. If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you like to go in school?

(check one)

*¿Si pudieras hacer exactamente lo que quisieras, ¿qué tan lejos te gustaría llegar en la escuela? (marca uno)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Some college  
*Algo de universidad*

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate from a two year college with an associate's degree (AA)  
*Graduarme de una universidad de dos años con un título de asociado*

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate from a four year college with a bachelor's degree (BA)  
*Graduarme de una universidad de cuatro años con un título de licenciatura*

\_\_\_\_\_ Get a master's degree (MA; teaching credential, social work, business)  
*Obtener una maestría (credencial de enseñanza, trabajo social, o negocios)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Get a law degree, a Ph.D., or a medical doctor's degree  
*Obtener un doctorado (como doctorado en leyes, doctor de medicina, u otro)*

Thank you  
Gracias

## Appendix C

### Question Protocol

First interview

Research questions addressed: 1. Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school?  
2. What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals? 3. How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?

Purpose	Possible Questions	Probe Respondent for:
<p>1. Introductions</p> <p>Information about me and the study; answer clarifying questions about research, use of data, etc.</p> <p><b>1.1 Background of Respondent</b></p>	<p>1. How did you enter the U.S.? Can you tell me about the trip?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">i. Who came with you?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">ii. Where and with whom did you stay when you first arrived?</p> <p>2. Have you been back home since you arrived? Can you tell me about that experience?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">i. How did you re-enter the U.S.?</p> <p>3. How old were you when you first came to the U.S.? What year?</p> <p>4. What are some of the things that are very important in your life? Why?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">i. Can you think of an experience/event or something that happened to you that makes this experience more important than other things?</p> <p>5. Do you know other youth who are in the same situation? Do you talk about it with them?</p>	<p>Border-crossing stories</p>
<p><b>1.2 Definition of Undocumented Status</b></p>	<p>1. What terms do you use to describe your immigration status?</p>	<p>Meaning of being undocumented</p>

**1.3 Impact of Undocumented Status**

- i. Why do you use this term over another?
- 1. Are there any activities that you avoid because of your status?
- 2. As an [...] what is the first thing you think about in regards to your status?
- 3. As an undocumented person, what is your greatest fear?
- 4. Given your experiences in the U.S. thus far, would you have entered the country if your parents gave you a choice? Explain.

Obstacles and plans

**1.4 Impact of Undocumentedness**

- 1. How does being undocumented shape your participation in society?
  - i. How is your life in “Small Town”?
- 2. Do you enjoy your life in this community? Explain.
  - i. Would you like to live in another community? If so, why?
  - ii. Can you think of a reason/experience that makes you feel this way?
- 3. What do you think most people think of undocumented persons?
- 4. Do you recall any experiences (negative and/or positive) you have had in the community? Explain.
  - i. What was your reaction?
  - ii. How do you feel about that?
  - iii. Why do think this happened?

Community life

**1.4 Future Possibilities**

- 1. What are your feelings about going to college?
  - i. Do you think you will apply to college?
  - ii. What would a college education mean to you?
  - iii. Do you see education playing a role in your future?
- 2. What does it mean to you to be successful in America?
- 3. Do you foresee any obstacles in realizing your dreams?
- 4. What is the greatest challenge you now face in getting a job?
- 5. What is the greatest challenge you now face in furthering your education?
- 6. What does “success” mean to you? Explain.

Educational and occupational aspirations

## Appendix D

### Question Protocol

Second interview

Research questions addressed: 1. Why do undocumented youth wish to continue their education beyond high school?  
 2. What are the major barriers in undocumented youths' achievement of their goals? 3. How do undocumented youth plan to achieve their aspirations?

Purpose	Possible Questions	Probe Respondent for:
<b>2.1 Possibilities within their border crossing stories</b>	1. What is a very important dream you have? 2. Can you think of anything that may prevent you from obtaining your dreams? 3. Have you been back to Mexico since you came the first time? Can you talk about this experience? If not, what prevents you from going back?	Dreams for the future and realistic expectations
<b>2.2 Work-related obstacles</b>	1. How do you go about getting a job? i. How do you keep a job? 2. Have you ever encountered any problems getting a job? If, so, which ones? i. Can you think of an experience and/or a time when this happened? 3. Can you share an experience you have had in the work place? i. What was your reaction? ii. How do you feel about that? iii. Why do think this happened?	Life obstacles
<b>2.3 Life plans</b>	1. What kinds of life plans do you have? i. Can you tell me why these are important to you? 2. What do you see yourself doing in 3 years? i. If this includes being in college, what information do you have so far about college admissions? ii. Have you applied? Explain. 3. What do you see yourself doing in 10 years? Explain. 4. Can you share some of your future goals/dreams? 5. Would you want to change anything about your life? If so, why? i. Can you think of a reason/experience that makes you feel this way?	Future plans

## Appendix E

**INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS**

My name is Alejandra Maria Varela, and I am student in the Urban Education P.h.D. Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled “Educational and professional aspirations among Mexican youth.” This is a research study about the educational and job aspirations of Mexican youth. As a result, I would like to know if you will be willing to allow your son or daughter to volunteer to fill out an anonymous survey about some of his/her school experiences, and the ways in which his/her education and immigration status may have influenced his/her educational and future job aspirations.

The survey consists of approximately 46 questions which will be taken voluntarily and at your son’s/daughter’s convenience. The survey should take him/her about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. All information gathered in the surveys will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access. At any time your son/daughter is free to discontinue the survey and he or she will not face any penalties or negative repercussions.

The benefits of your son’s/daughter’s participation in this study are that you will help the researcher and others to better understand the relationships between educational aspirations, occupational achievement after high school and immigration status.

I may publish results of the study, but the names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address, and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at (973) 626-6295 or email me at [alejandra.seides@gmail.com](mailto:alejandra.seides@gmail.com), or my advisor Dr. Michelli at (917) 882-7670 or email him at [nmichelli@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:nmichelli@gc.cuny.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7525, [kpowell@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:kpowell@gc.cuny.edu).

Thank you for allowing your son/daughter to participate in the study. You can take this information sheet with you.

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS

My name is Alejandra Varela, and I am doing a study as a doctoral student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). The title of this project is: “Educational and professional aspirations among Mexican youth.” The study consists of one survey which you can take voluntarily and at your convenience under my supervision.

As a result, you have been asked to volunteer for this study.

I understand that...

1. I must obtain verbal parental permission from my parents if I am under 18 before taking the survey, and I must inform Alejandra Varela of the time, date and manner in which the permission took place.
2. Some of the questions will be related to the school experiences in my immediate neighborhood.
3. I will answer some questions about future goals.
4. No names will be on any papers with the questions and answers given.
5. My answers will remain confidential and my name or any other characteristics that can identify me will not be given in the final report.
6. My answers will be compared with those of another group of Mexican students.
7. I can stop completing the survey at any time.
8. I, my parent or guardian can ask for a copy of the study results when it is completed.

I understand that this study has been revised and approved by the Institutional Review Board on Human Subjects in research at the Graduate Center /City University of New York. For research related problems or questions, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, Office of Research and Sponsored programs at 212-817-7525.

If at any point you have any further questions about this study please contact me or my advisor.

Contacts:

Alejandra M. Varela  
 Doctoral Student  
 Urban Education Department  
 City University of New York  
 Office Phone (973) 626-6295

Dr. Nicholas Michelli  
 Study Supervisor  
 Presidential Professor, Urban Education Department  
 Graduate Center, City University of New York  
 Office Phone (917) 882-7670

## **PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM**

My name is Alejandra Maria Varela, and I am student in the Urban Education P.h.D. Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled “Educational aspirations among Mexican youth.” This is a research study about the educational and job aspirations of Mexican students and how immigration status may affect their educational aspirations. As a result, I would like to know if you will be willing to allow your son or daughter to volunteer to fill out an anonymous survey about some of his/her school experiences, and the ways in which their education and immigration status may have influenced his/her educational and future job aspirations.

The survey consists of approximately 46 questions which will be taken voluntarily and at your son’s and/or daughter’s convenience. The survey should take him/her about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. All information gathered in the surveys will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access. At any time your son or daughter is free to discontinue the survey and he or she will not face any penalties or negative repercussions.

There are no risks involved in this study. The benefits of your son’s/daughter’s participation in this study are that the answers will help the researcher and others to better understand the relationships between educational aspirations, occupational achievement after high school and immigration status.

I may publish the results of the study, but the names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at (973) 626-6295 or email me at [alejandra.seides@gmail.com](mailto:alejandra.seides@gmail.com), or my advisor Dr. Michelli at (917) 882-7670 or email him at [nmichelli@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:nmichelli@gc.cuny.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7525, [kpowell@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:kpowell@gc.cuny.edu).

Thank you for allowing your son/daughter to participate in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

I agree that my son/daughter complete this survey.

Yes      No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent (Guardian's) name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## STUDENT ASSENT FORM

My name is Alejandra Varela, and I am doing a study as a doctoral student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The purpose of this study is to analyze whether the immigration status of Mexican youth affects in any way their educational and job aspirations. The study consists of one survey of approximately 46 questions which you can take voluntarily and at your convenience under my supervision.

As a result, you have been asked to volunteer for this study.

I understand that...

1. Some of the questions will be related to the school experiences in my immediate neighborhood.
2. I will answer some questions about future goals.
3. No names will be on any papers with the questions and answers given.
4. My answers will remain confidential and my name or any other characteristics that can identify me will not be given in the final report.
5. My answers will be compared with those of another group of Mexican students.
6. I need to sign this paper to help with the study.
7. I can stop completing the survey at any time.
8. I or my parent or guardian can ask for a copy of the study results.

I understand that this exploratory study has been revised and approved by the Institutional Review Board on Human Subjects in research at the Graduate Center /City University of New York. For research related problems or questions I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, Office of Research and Sponsored programs at 212-817-7525.

I have read and understand the explanations provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to help in this study.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_  
Print name

Student: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sign here

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Alejandra Maria Varela - Investigator

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contacts:

Alejandra M. Varela  
Doctoral Student  
Urban Education Department  
City University of New York  
Office Phone (973) 626-6295

Dr. Nicholas Michelli  
Study Supervisor  
Presidential Professor, Urban Education Department  
Graduate Center, City University of New York  
Office Phone (917) 882-7670

## VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Hi, my name is Alejandra Maria Varela, and I am doing a research study titled “Educational aspirations among Mexican youth” at the City University of New York, Graduate Center. I would like to know if you will be willing to allow your son or daughter to volunteer to fill out an anonymous survey of approximately 47 questions about some of his/her school experiences, and the ways in which his education has influenced his/her education and future job aspirations. Your son’s or daughter’s answers in the survey will help me and other investigators to better understand the relationships between educational aspirations and immigration status. There will be approximately 120 participants taking part in this study.

All of your son’s/ daughter’s answers will be given a special identifying number rather than his/her name. All of the papers pertaining to this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and all electronic data will be stored in computer files. Only I and my adviser have direct access to these records. When the project is finished and results are reported, no individual will be identified in any way. Your son’s/ daughter’s participation is voluntary. She/he can refuse to participate, and you can stop his/her participation at any time, if you wish to do so, without any negative consequences to you.

As a result, I am asking for your permission to allow your son/ daughter to take the survey.

**Do you have any questions/comments?**

**Questions/Comments made by parent:**

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Parent of participant 01 gave verbal consent on \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Time

Parent of participant 01 did not give verbal consent on \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Time

If you have any additional questions or concerns about the study please feel free to contact me, my advisor, or the university research office at any time in the numbers provided to you in the Information Sheet.

Thank you

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Contact the principal investigator for further information  
<sup>ii</sup> Contact the principal investigator for further information  
<sup>iii</sup> Contact the principal investigator for further information  
<sup>iv</sup> Contact the principal investigator for further information  
<sup>v</sup> Contact the principal investigator for further information